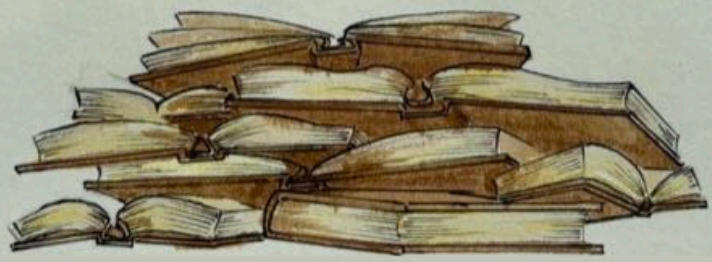
Magister-Auctor Saga



Leaden times

Birth Pharm

Babitha Chakma

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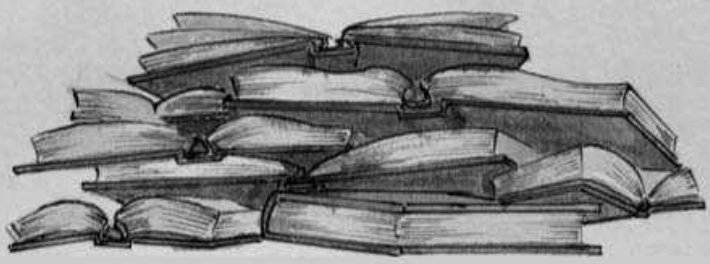
Magister-Auctor Saga



Leaden times

Birth Pharm

Sayeri Quispe

Babitha Chakma

Zairabu Chebol

To Manuel, Sebastião
and Olívia

Foreword

We have entered the saga's one hundred and nineteenth hectoyear (the twentieth century of the Christian era) and have thus arrived at the generation of Joana and Catarina Demeester's great-grandparents and grandparents. Those who have read the saga chronologically from *A dangerous thought* to *Enlightened Citizen School* may notice that in this book, the time period is depicted in a slightly different way. There are slightly fewer dialogues about events in which the family is not directly involved. We continue to sketch a broader framework, but often this has not been discussed by the family members themselves as soon as we get into *1914 DC* (year 119.14). This choice, which we made as chroniclers, is partly due to the sources available to us. We base our work on the library of Paulo Demeester. Most of the notes contained there concern the family itself, including grandparents, parents, his own generation, and the generation of his daughters. The documents were excavated in Megalissipo, while few written documents from or about the family have yet been found in the Megabelgium region until the Third Dynasty. The city of Oostende, where several generations of the family lived, has not yet been uncovered. Thanks to available maps and other documents and traditions, mostly from other libraries in cities in the center of former Belgium, we naturally know where the city was located and what it looked like. We have partial descriptions of who lived and worked there, but the city itself is still under a thick layer of volcanic ash and ice.

It can also be quite clearly established that long-distance, unwritten communication, characteristic of the hectoyears that now follows leading up to the Rebuilding, makes much contextual information oral again. We are talking about the telephone, spoken information via radio, and, from the middle of the 19th hectoyear, also television. This changes the content of personal letters, which we have been able to use as an important source throughout the saga. Thanks to these letters, we can find other relevant sources of information, primarily consisting of books and reports preserved in the central libraries of Bibliopolis, Culturopolis, Perolapolis, and Arqueopolis. Much of the oral information stored analog and digitally from the 19th hectoyear up to the Reconstruction was irreversibly destroyed by the successive electromagnetic storms of about a hundred years ago.

The letters we've found from more recent generations are often more personal and less detailed about general events. This makes it more difficult to specifically link the available information from that period to the family. In other words, it's harder for us to understand what the family actually knew about the events of their time. Paulo Demeester's rediscovered library does provide a glimpse into his interests outside of education. This is also true, to a lesser extent, for his daughters.

What we write about Lucien Souris is derived from the documents we found in Paulo's library. This represents a bit of a side trip into the family saga, as it's easier for us to place him in his time than Louis Demeester. We know relatively little about him after the death of his mother, Jeanne Teacher. We felt it was important to explain the war periods, which lasted half a

century, to understand the evolution of the Magister-Auctor family. For this, we used the documents by and about Lucien Souris.

Of course, it remains possible to adjust the content of this book if new data becomes available from the period immediately preceding that of the Demeester sisters, about whom much was written after ignarometric analysis was systematically incorporated into the social sciences. As the Little Guide indicates, Maria Liber provides the necessary corrections based on newly discovered sources.

Enjoy reading the further adventures of the Teacher-Demeester generations of the Magister-Auctor dynasty.

Bibliopolis, Ektowomehns 122.25
Binh Pham, Babitha Chakma,
Sayen Quispe, Zainabu Cheboi

Para bellum si vis bellum

Esperanto without hope

Johanna closes the barn door after with Frederick having browsed through notebooks left behind. They also gazed nostalgically at the few wall charts. Frederick remembers the times he spent there with Annie. Johanna slowly follows him to the main farm building where Annie is preparing dinner. Annie will soon be taking the train back to Liège, while Frederick will stay with his mother for some time now that he has retired. Johanna has been struggling with her memory for a while, and Annie and Frederick have agreed with his sisters Lut and Monique to take turns so that someone can always be with Johanna at the farm.

Frederick enjoys spending more time in Free Moresnet. He's naturally unhappy that his mother's health is the reason, but he doesn't hide the fact that he feels good to regularly see his father's remaining pub friends and some of his own friends who stayed behind, either at the farm or in the pub on those days when his mother goes to bed early. He occasionally speaks with Wilhelm Molly and the three or four other Esperanto enthusiasts. He himself already speaks the language quite well and has a subscription to *Lingvo Internacia*. Sometimes they discuss the apparent stagnation surrounding the legal status of their neutral country. This is all the more important to Frederick because he feels uneasy in Belgium governed by conservative Catholics, which is also heading for a malaise now that there are increasing international indications that the entire Congo Free

State was a strategy by King Leopold to enrich himself, without being entirely clear to what extent the Belgian elite and government themselves are involved in the whole affair.

"Your king is being portrayed in an increasingly bad light," notes Julien, one of the sons of Johanna's friend and former colleague Carine.

Frederick laughs. "To begin with, my dear friend, I was born in Kelmis, just like you, so, just like you, he is not *my* king, even though I have lived in Liège for most of my life. For the rest, I agree that the tide is apparently turning and that he is receiving a great deal of criticism in international forums. I am no monarchist, but I cannot help but notice that the attacks on his policies are coming from those who, as colonial monarchs or republicans, are no less than his."

"That's right," says a random guest speaking French with a strong English accent. "Last year in Britain, a resolution was even passed in the *House of Commons* to condemn the Free State. And there are reasons for this. There are constantly new reports that the Congolese population is drastically declining. The initial reports were a good reason to send Consul Casement to investigate."

"Oh," says Frederick, "that's where came from that famous report Annie's friends were talking about last week. That Casement paper was supposedly sent to 'the authorities' of the Free State in February. According to Annie, that's the whole point, because 'the authorities' ultimately is Leopold in person."

"Yes," the Brit replies, "but that's not fresh news. I work for the *Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine*. We received a request to

help combat tropical diseases. According to 'the authorities', the population decline was linked to sleeping sickness and smallpox. Now, smallpox isn't exactly a tropical disease. Moreover, rumours keep circulating that the population decline is linked to forced labour and abuse. On the one hand, many people are dying, and on the other, women are avoiding childbearing. This happens frequently in other colonised regions as well.

"But what is the solution then?" asks Frederick.

"Look, I'm part of the *Congo Reform Association*. We believe it would be better if the Belgian government recognised the colony as its own. That would perhaps facilitate oversight of what happens there. We don't immediately see any other alternative. Forcing Leopold to give up the Free State would likely lead to colonial wars to take over the territory, certainly between France and Great Britain, but perhaps also with the German Empire under the leadership of your Prussian neighbours."

"Apparently you're well informed," Julien notes.

"I hear something here and there, yes."

Frederick and Julien wink at each other. It's probably no coincidence that the Briton is some evasive when asked for his name. He apparently stays at the Hotel Bergerhoff for a few days. He may well be there registered under an assumed name. This isn't the first time that individuals with discreet diplomatic missions or simply unofficial duties have used Moresnet as a base for exchanging information with contacts in Belgium, France, and the German Reich.

Shortly after this conversation with the now disappeared

Briton, Annie tells Frederick that a new investigative committee is once again pressuring the Belgian government to investigate the atrocities. Reports of a reign of terror are increasing, and more and more stories emerge about the chopping off of the hands of rebels.

Annie came to accompany Frederick for the weekend, and now they are traveling back to Liège together. Johanna has been left in the care of Frederick's sister, Monique. He will return in a month and a half. On the train, Annie tells about the visit of a young pacifist from Albi, who is talking about the organisation of the *Verrerie de Carmaux*. He spoke at a union meeting but the meeting focused primarily on Jean Jaurès. He was deeply impressed by his words at a graduation ceremony for the final-year students of the local *lycée*. What stuck with him was the impassioned call to reflect on courage. He recounted that Jaurès said, among other things: '*Above all, let no one accuse us of diminishing or irritating courage. Humanity is cursed if, for the sake of courage, it is condemned to eternal killing. Courage today is not about maintaining the dark cloud of war over the world, a terrible but dormant cloud, which we cannot always hope will only burst upon others. Courage does not mean abandoning to violence the resolution of conflicts that reason can resolve; for courage is the glorification of humanity, and this is the renunciation of humanity. For all of you, every hour of the day, courage means persevering without hesitation in the face of the physical and moral trials of all kinds that life presents. Courage is to be simultaneously, regardless of one's profession, an achiever and a philosopher. Courage is to understand, clarify, deepen, establish, and attune one's own life to*

the general life. Courage is to seek the truth and tell it; it is not to submit to the law of the passing triumphant lie. Courage is not to let the imbecile applause and the fanatical boos resound with our souls, our mouths and our hands'."

"It seems as if Jaurès is expecting another war."

"He's not alone. Jeanne tells me that she and her friends from the *active school* from different European countries often exchange ideas about how, for example, geography and history lessons are locally linked to myth-making. Heroes are evoked who defend the fatherland, as was the case in Belgium with the works of Hendrik Conscience, remember? In France, warlike language is even openly used in schools when discussing Prussia and the German Empire. It would be good if our German friends would expand their ideas about coeducation. Not only is bringing boys and girls together important, but bringing children from different regions together would also be a good thing."

"Hmm," Frederick replies. "I remember Jeanne's report upon her return from Abbotsholme. Bringing together young people from different regions wasn't a problem there. But they were young people of wealthy parents and local leaders or notables in the British Empire. That doesn't seem sufficient to me. And if I understand correctly, those German friends were partly inspired by the initiatives of the British *active schools*. Ultimately, international contacts remain limited to the children of the highest classes."

Annie and Frederick are still discussing education and the influence of schools in fostering national, or rather, nationalistic,

feelings when they arrive at Jeanne and Lodewijks' house. Little Louis interrupts their conversation when he gives them a cackling smile and extends his hands to be taken from the floor, which Annie immediately does.
A little later, when they sit down and Louis has fallen asleep, Lodewijk says: "I heard you talking about the national feelings stirred up at school. I was reminded of what I read by Frans Van Cauwelaert in *Ons Leven (Our Life)*. He's talking about the bishops who claim that students who participate in protests organised by the Flemish Movement during the holidays should be punished. He questions the extent of the church authorities' legal authority in independent secondary education. I agree punishing students for protesting outside of school about something that neither the school nor the church has anything to do with amounts to abuse of power."
"This certainly won't increase national sentiment among those young people," Jeanne believes. "But will it strengthen general human cohesion, or will they fragment local society into even more hostile groups and factions?"

During June and July 1905, Jeanne and little Louis spent several weeks with Jeanne's father at Johanna's farm. These days, Johanna sleeps almost all the time. During the brief periods when she's more alert, she enjoys having Louis around and sometimes starts telling him a story. Jeanne generally quickly grasps the subject and helps her when she gets confused. Louis quite enjoys these stories from Great-Grandma Johanna. The two-year-old looks at her earnestly when he sits on her lap and often strokes her chin as she speaks.

Yet everyone knows that eighty-eight-year-old Johanna is now rapidly deteriorating. Frederick sends a telegram to Annie on July 19th, saying: *'Mom is not well. Join us quickly.'* The next day, Annie and Lodewijk arrive in Kelmis. The family spends the night watching over Johanna, who awakens during the morning and looks at the others with a clear gaze, saying: "Henri and I have had a wonderful life, despite all the arrogant ignorance that separates people. Helping people think—is there a more beautiful task?" With that, Johanna falls back asleep. Two hours later, she opens her eyes briefly and says: "Dear boy, don't forget to lock the barn. There's no class tomorrow," after which she closes her eyes again, and a moment later, her breathing almost ceases imperceptibly.

After Johanna's death, Frederick decides to make some adjustments to the farm. The outbuildings are converted into individual cottages, which he makes available to several young couples. The vegetable garden is maintained by the entire community, and the produce is divided equally. The farmyard quickly becomes a new meeting place, often frequented not only by the farm residents but also by neighbours and friends from Kelmis. Julien jokes that Frederick will have trouble with the local pub owners. But it doesn't get that bad. During these farmyard meetings, they discuss global cooperation without a prior armed occupation. Besides, one of the farmyard residents points out, it's difficult to achieve cooperation with someone who first coerces obedience.

"You have to start somewhere," says Frederick. "There has to be a breaking point somewhere, but there has to be consensus on it."

“Was the opportunism ninety years ago of the industrialists who owned *Vieille-Montagne* such a potential turning point?” asks Julien.

Jeanne laughs. “From what I understand from my father’s history and, earlier, from my grandmother’s, Kelmis often benefited more from the absence of a consensus than from its existence.”

One of Molly’s young protégés, a pacifist and Esperantist, looks up in surprise: “But haven’t the people of Kelmis always strived for their own place, without the need for an army or central government?”

Now it’s Lodewijk’s turn to be surprised: “You can hardly say there’s no central government in Free Moresnet. There’s even a kind of imposed central government. As far as I know, the mayor has never been elected, and the Napoleonic Code, which still governs, was introduced by commissioners living far away, not by consensus among the local population.”

Frederick then replies: “Your local population at that time was mainly an illiterate working class population who worked in the mines or factories. The social contract and Rousseau were unknown to them.”

“Maybe they should have had a Jaurès back then,” another resident suggests. “Or we should have one now, I don’t know.”

The young Esperantist then replies: “Jaurès recently spoke about the capitalist class society. He said: ‘*Your society, violent, chaotic, carries war within it, like a cloud carries a storm*.’ But he also referred to the war industry, which he called the ‘*international of shells and cannons*.’ He stated: ‘*I am concerned about the*

nationalist and chauvinistic intoxication that is gaining ground among the people. We want a strong and free French and republican homeland, but we do not want panicked peoples to be thrown against each other under the pretext of patriotism.'."

Julien nods and says: "Warmongers like to quote a saying from ancient Rome that those who strive for peace must prepare for war. That seems false to me. What's going on in their minds, I think, is the opposite. They strive for war, so they talk about peace all the time. If you strive for peace, make sure people can be educated in dialogue. Peace thrives when people are less arrogant and less ignorant; I think our friends Lemaître-Teacher can attest to that."

Frederick also nods. "But money and possessions bring power, and power breeds arrogance. We have a nearly three-hundred-year-old track record that the school that could make Knowledge common property, actually serves those arrogant rulers just to prevent Knowledge for being universalised. Those in power themselves often demonstrate how they try to use the school for their own interests, and that's not good for humanity as a whole."

Jeanne then says: "I'm afraid we've recently had another example of what dad is saying in Belgium. Have you heard about the International Congress on World Expansion in Mons? At that congress, organised by the Belgian government, global economic expansion was discussed. They also outlined what they expect from schools. They're asking school inspectors to encourage schoolteachers to talk to students about world expansion."

Lodewijk continues: “Students must be encouraged to work far from home, including in Africa. Geography brings Africa closer, and the mother tongue is used to master trade correspondence. Of course, history lessons serve this kind of objective well. *Great Belgians* are portrayed as tough guys who went on to conquer the world. Let the youth get excited about the idea of going to Congo, it seems.”

“But it’s based on incomplete or incorrect information, covered in a kind of heroic sauce,”Jeanne adds. “I recently learned there is a suitable song for this.”

She then sings one verse:

> “On a distant shore, the sun glows strongly on the heads,
> the Congo River flows grand and wide through forests,
> Where between lush and high grass the elephant, the lion,
> the tiger and the leopard lives, there lies the Congo of us all!
> Up! Belgians! Up! Remember your ancestors. Heads up!
> There, an infinite field calls to you, activity to be picked up.

Don’t you feel like to stand up and leave now?”

Laughter erupts, after which Julien concludes: “We laugh about this, but ultimately, this is not only painful but also dangerous. We seem increasingly distant from the dream of a united, free humanity that always lies at the heart of every new movement. Who still supports the ideals of the International Labour Movement? Many of its own factional leaders do not. Among them, quite a few are greedy for their own share of power and possessions.”

Frederick looks at Julien and says: “Do you remember our fathers’ conversations in the pub, when they were talking about the human zoo on the Spui in Antwerp and about Frans Boas?

Someone who also reacted very strongly to that inhumane practice was Félicien Cattier. He is now a professor at the law faculty of the Free University of Brussels. He recently sent a pamphlet by Mark Twain to a colleague in Liège. The text is titled *King Leopold's Monologue: A Defence of His Congo rule* and in the foreword Félicien Cattier writes: *'Leopold II is the absolute master of all the internal and external activities of the Congo Free State. The organisation of justice, the army, the industrial and commercial regimes are feely established by himself. He can say, and with greater precision than Louis XIV: 'I am the State.'*.' That Cattier, who moves in high circles, apparently does not mince his words."

Julien looks at his friend for a long time and says, "We'll see." He turns to Lodewijk and continues, "Your father-in-law always believes in the good of humanity. He's often right, but people with a lot of money or a lot of power sometimes have their own interpretation of what's good for humanity…"

Lodewijk and Jeanne laugh.

"Keep laughing," says Frederick. "But listen to this bit of the King's supposed monologue: *'They observe that* "if the innocent blood spilled by King Leopold in the Congo State were put into buckets and the buckets placed side by side, the line would stretch for 3,000 kilometers; if the skeletons of his ten million starved and slaughtered dead could stand up and march in single file, it would take the line seven months and four days to pass a given point; if they were massed into a single group, they would cover more ground than St. Louis, including the World's Fair; if they all clap their bony hands at once, that ghastly clap

would be heard at a distance of —" — *Damn it, I'm getting tired of it! And they tell similar stories about the money I've distilled from that blood and pocketed. They pile it into Egyptian pyramids; they carpet the Sahara with it; they scatter it across the sky, and the earth remains in the twilight of the cast shadow. And the tears I've caused, the hearts I've broken — oh, nothing can convince them to leave me alone!* [Meditative pause] *Well... it doesn't matter, I've got the Yankees on my side anyway! There's some comfort in that.* [Reads with a mocking smile the President's Order of Recognition of April 22, 1884]…"the Government of the United States declares its sympathy and approval for the humane and benevolent purposes of (*my Congo plan*), and will direct the officers of the United States, both on land and at sea, to recognise their flag as the flag of a friendly government."

Jeanne asks: "But is Twain's pamphlet a collection of effective statements by Leopold, or is it a story based on what international commissions published about the Congo Free State?"

"Twain is said to have documented himself in various ways. For example, he cites the following passage from an actual debate held in the Belgian Parliament more than two years ago. He cites: *'This work of 'civilisation' is a massive and ongoing slaughter. All the facts we presented in this Chamber were initially vehemently denied; but later, they were gradually substantiated by documents and official texts'.* And also: *'It is said that the practice of cutting off hands is contrary to the instructions; but you are content to say that indulgence should be shown and that this bad habit should be corrected "little by little," and you further advocate that only the hands of fallen enemies should be cut off, and that if*

the hands are cut off of 'enemies' who are not quite dead, and who after recovery have had the bad taste to come to the missionaries and show them their stumps, this was due solely to an original mistake of thinking them dead.' These kinds of observations and statements certainly indicate that the text effectively reproduces the King's pronouncements. According to Mark Twain, this last debate dates back to July 1903."

One of the residents then counters that the King has some people who defend him unconditionally. Among them Stanley, who, shortly after the debate, reportedly said the King was no more responsible for the crimes in Congo than for those occurring in Belgium. According to Stanley, these are merely fabrications, of which he never received confirmation on the ground. Moreover, he says, the King of the Belgians put an end to the Arab-driven slave trade, something no other living monarch can say."

There is booing.

"Of course Stanley has to say things like that," Julien thinks. "He served Leopold almost his entire life."

One evening, Jeanne and Lodewijk speak with Frederick about the *Solvay Institute for Sociology.* Jeanne remembers from her grandmother's notes something about a young Portuguese, Vasconcelos, who presented his thesis *The psychology of child crowds* at that institute. Jeanne researched this recently created institute. Already, just three years after its founding, it was one of the most welcoming places in Belgium. When a foreigner applied for admission, their religious or political views were never inquired about; all willing volunteers, big or small, were

welcome. From what she learned, much of it has to do with the institute's director, Max Waxweiler, who believes that the atmosphere of freedom, coupled with a well-stocked library, is itself a source of inspiration. Lodewijk asks if Max Waxweiler is a Freemason. Frederick smiles and says that it's difficult to know exactly who is a Freemason if one does not belong to a lodge oneself.

"But doesn't the University of Brussels have ties with the Freemasons?" asks Lodewijk.

"Perhaps at its founding," Frederick answers. "But the university was primarily a liberal response to the dogmatic side of the Catholic universities, shortly after Belgium was formed at the conference tables after Waterloo. Why your interest in the Freemasons?"

"I was thinking about what Jeanne and I heard from Edward Peeters, you know, our friend from Oostende. He wrote us about a group of young people from Ghent who were starting their Levensreform society. *Reiner Leven* started after a study trip to the Netherlands, and an encounter with Lodewijk van Mierop and Felix Ortt. The latter is also a reference for Edward himself. According to Edward, the group is supposedly made up of Freemasons. But recently we were talking with two teacher friends about the first women at the university, and then we heard that there apparently is also a group of young women from various backgrounds in Ghent who are calling themselves *De Flinken (The Courageous Ones* or *the nimble)* in close contact with *Reiner Leven*. That group includes Vera Tondeur, you know, the math and physics student at Ghent University."

Frederick then notes: “I don’t think it matters much whether the Freemasons are involved in this or not. What I do think is important is that there is interest in intellectual circles for greater openness in higher education and for more co-education in primary or primary education. And, since you just mentioned that Portuguese, Jeanne, I thought you were going to talk about what you recently told me about the *active school* which is being launched in Lisbon.”

“Yes, that’s also news from Edward. But as far as I know, António Vasconcelos doesn’t have anything directly to do with it. It’s supposed to be an initiative of liberal, somewhat anarchist Freemasons. The *Escola Oficina* could be translated as something like Workshop School. But it seems to me to be a very local initiative.”

“Yes,” says Lodewijk. “I know thanks to the *League* and the teachers’ union that Portuguese teachers are primarily trying to organize their own mutual health insurance. Something like this has existed for teachers since 1897, and now the lyceum teachers would also have an association that would bear the name *Official Secondary Education Association*. But you find in the mutual associations those who want to move to a more confrontational class syndicalism, as in other places in Europe where the different factions of the Workers’ International have come into conflict with each other.”

It’s rather curious to know that while the friends and residents of Henri and Johanna’s farm were speculating about the Freemasons, Esperanto would soon become increasingly talked about in Moresnet, thanks to them. During 1906, the French

Esperanto enthusiast Gustave Roy settled in Aachen. A Freemason, he sought out the local lodge and met Wilhelm Molly. The two men soon found common ground in the spread of Esperanto. While they were planning together for an independent Moresnet with Esperanto as the national language, the German government tried once again to convince the Belgian government to accept the 1880 borders of the condominium. But the Belgian government objected. This would make most of the people now living in the neutral territory German. Moreover, the situation would be such that one side of the main street in Kelmis would be Belgian and the other side German. That would open the door wide to even more smuggling between neighbours. Although Mayor Smetz has sympathies towards the German government, he understands well the feelings of the population, which even adopted it as a kind of slogan *Neutral always, Belgian maybe, German never.* Perhaps it would be better to hold off the Germans for the time being with promises to close distilleries that produce cheaper alcohol than across both borders, to curb smuggling, and to demonstrate with small public works that they are investing in the region as neutrals.

During the second half of this first decade of the twentieth century (hectoyear 119), Jeanne and Lodewijk spend almost all their free time at the farm where Frederick has now taken up permanent residence. Jeanne has more contact with her aunts Lut and Monique than she ever had during her grandparents' lifetime. The main reason for coming to Kelmis so often is that Louis can play here without limits under the watchful eye of the

adults of the small community of farmsteads dwellers, now that Jeanne needs a lot of time with their second baby. Although the train connection from Liège to Tienen is easier than to Kelmis, Lodewijk clearly shows that he has more conversation partners here in Kelmis than at his family's manor house in Tienen.

During one of their many conversations, Frederick discusses how the first language a person learns to speak can influence their conceptualisation. He notes that Germanic languages have a neutral word to indicate both genders *mens* or *Mensch* while the Latin languages have to make do with the word *Man* albeit with a capital letter when referring to men and women together. Lodewijk thinks about this for a while. One evening he makes the following remark: "There are different words in different languages, including Latin, to talk about people and not so much about men or women in particular. Just think of *les gens*, for people, ore *as pessoas*, *a gente*, *las personas*."

Frederick replies: "Yes, but when it comes to humanity, you get words where the stem *man* in it: mankind, l'Homme, Uomo, homme."

Lodewijk smiles and says: "And yet you can also think of humanity, humanité, humanidade. Besides, we're talking about European languages here. I heard from a seminarian priest that there are still languages where the concepts of man, human, and humanity are clearly distinguished. In Swahili, these are respectively mwanamume, mtu, and ubinadamu. Woman is mwanamke."

Frederick thinks and then says: "But don't you think that the words used influence the formation of concepts? In French you

say *parents* when you talk about the parents, in Portuguese it is more the family in general, *relatives*. And if one then *parents* use the word *pais*, plural of father, you have the male boss again, right?"

Lodewijk responds: "Words certainly play a role, but words are created by people and their meaning evolves. And if you extend what you're saying, because you're apparently thinking about the position of men and women in society, then something like co-education or general studies for women and men should have been normal long before Comenius in the Europe of the Germanic languages. I think the unequal treatment of people has more to do with the morality of the normative religious leaders than with the use of words. But of course, I prefer to hear people talk about *anthropos* then *paidos* when we talk about guiding learning, because it's not just children who need that guidance; people do. That's why I find it odd when someone talks about the pedagogical approach with adults."

"So in this case, it's not enough to simply accept that the word evolved," Frederick points out, causing Lodewijk to laugh.

"Perhaps for some concepts you need new words, for others, the evolution of words?"

Lodewijk replies: "I don't even think there's a rule. I don't know what our Esperanto friends think about it. They probably often have to create new words from the roots Zamenhof originally proposed. But is this simply a matter of translating a word that exists in some local language, or is it about expressing a new concept? How often do we use words from other spheres to explain such a concept?"

“Funny you should mention this now,” Frederick replies. I was recently browsing through a biography of Condorcet and found some of his reflections on the difference between arithmetic and political arithmetic. D'Alembert describes the word in mathematical terms *Arithmétique* in the first edition of the Encyclopedia but Condorcet is said to have said that political arithmetic is *‘in its more extensive sense: the application of calculations to political science’*. But political science is not a natural science, and determining cause and effect is not mathematically self-evident here. According to Condorcet, it is difficult to make progress in political arithmetic if one is more concerned with mathematical analysis than with political science. Moreover, Condorcet is also quoted to have said that political science, which he believed was in its infancy in his time, would develop little as long as those with a thorough knowledge of political science continued to apply their mathematical talents to it.”
Lodewijk thinks: “A kind of ‘*cobbler stick to your last*’?”
“I would say: cobbler think about how you use your last if you want to make something other than shoes,” Frederick answers.

During the summer of 1906, the family is sitting together when Jeanne suddenly says: “Francisco Ferrer is in prison and his *Modern Schools* are closed indefinitely.”
Lut asks: “What happened? Did your anarchist throw bombs?”
Jeanne replies: “He’s not ‘our’ anarchist, he doesn’t throw bombs, but we do subscribe his vision of education. No, a bomb was thrown at King Alfonso and Victoria of Battenberg on the day of their wedding. They were unharmed, but spectators died.

It wasn't difficult for conservative Catholics to suspect Ferrer. Although no one in those circles was particularly enthusiastic about the king's marriage to a Protestant aristocrat from lower nobility, the bomb was thrown by an anarchist. Now it turns out the bomber was friends with an employee of Ferrer's publishing house. The newspapers are writing that this kind of riot is the result of the secular and socialist-anarchist education that Ferrer advocates. But various educational journals are showing this to be false and calling for international support."

"And so," Monique says with a laugh, "you're already working on organising that support. If I can help you with some of our union contacts, I'd be happy to."

"And now that we're talking about pedagogical publications," Jeanne continues, "Edward wrote to me that since he read Felix Ortt's work *Letter to my sister* he translated this rather original text on sexual education into French, but couldn't find a publisher in Flanders for the book because it was considered too obscene. Edward is considering establishing his own publishing house, like the Dutch *Pure Life* movement did."

"Our library will soon grow…" predicts Lodewijk.

"You can already include Cattier's work in it," says Lut. "My brother recently told me that you were talking about him in connection with his criticism of the human zoo and of Leopold and his Congo policy. In his *Étude sur la situation de l'État indépendant du Congo* he writes *'The Congo State is not a colonised state, hardly a state at all: it is a financial enterprise.'* And then he goes on and says *'The colony is not governed in the interests of the natives, nor even in the economic interests of*

Belgium: providing the Sovereign King with maximum resources is the driving force'. Now I know that a lot of work is being done behind the scenes to find a solution that will involve more the Belgian government. That financial institution might well end up with different managers."
"Do you think so?" asks Louis.
Lut responds: "Cattier isn't the only one who's very critical. There are other prominent Belgian figures looking for a solution to keep Congo out of the international spotlight, not at least for economic reasons. Some, including former Prime Minister Auguste Beernaert, even believe this would ultimately benefit the Congolese people."
"I thought that at the moment the Belgian government was mainly concerned with international arbitration," Monique notes.
"That's right," her sister replies, "but don't forget that he was, or still is, a director of companies that have to do with Congo and that he has been somewhat at odds with the Belgian King for more than ten years."

A few months later, Gustave Roy visits Wilhelm Molly in Kelmis. The now-retired doctor shows his new friend around Free Moresnet. This includes a visit to the Hotel Bergerhoff. They speak with other Esperantists living in Moresnet. Lodewijk and Frederick are enthusiastic about the idea of promoting Esperanto but doubt the feasibility of making it the official language of Moresnet. It would, of course, benefit neutrality and perhaps give international weight to recognising the mini-state as independent from Belgium and the German Empire. Gustave

Roy is convinced that he can achieve some international success. First and foremost, he wants to present and defend the project at an international Esperanto congress. Wilhelm Molly takes several local young people under his wing who can help him to popularise Esperanto in Moresnet itself. There is intense discussion about the establishment and independence of what *Amikejo* will be. That's the name the proponents want to use to present the Moresnet project to the Esperanto world. To begin with, it would be interesting to move the Central Bureau for Esperanto to Kelmis.

When Jeanne hears about the wild plans of Gustave Roy and Wilhelm Molly, she thinks that Frederick and Lodewijk will now be fully involved in spreading the language. The Esperanto philosophy is a beautiful peace concept, and Jeanne knows that many prominent European pacifists are fond of the language. From Molly to Ferrer, from Jaurès to the residents of Kelmis, from congress to congress, Esperantists want to demonstrate their active commitment to international solidarity and against the threats of war. Socialist and anarchist supporters see this common language, without a dominant nation-state behind it, as a useful instrument for international and unfettered resistance to the strategies of major power leaders.
But Jeanne is not very reassured.
And even among non-Esperantists today you will those who are committed to maintaining peace at all costs.
Jurists like Auguste Beernaert advocate for international arbitration and see The Hague as the ideal location for a structure capable of handling such arbitration. The Second

Hague Peace Conference was recently held. Bertha Von Suttner was the only woman present. She and Tobias Asser received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1905 for their efforts to base international relations on dialogue rather than violence. Jeanne knows her from the novella *Die Waffen nieder!* (*Lay down your weapons!)* and read carefully what she said when accepting the Nobel Prize last April. She particularly remembers the passage where Mrs. von Suttner speaks of international agreements to move forward: '*Either our Europe will become a showpiece of ruin and failure, or we will succeed in averting this danger and enter a coming era of secure peace and justice, in which a civilisation of unimaginable glory will develop.'* She was already critical at the time about how the second Hague Conference had been prepared, with, in her view put the wrong topics on the agenda: '*Not one of the aspects of what should be discussed, instead of the proposed topics relating to the laws and practices of war at sea, the bombardment of ports, towns and villages, the laying of mines, and so on*.'

Jeanne fully endorses the idea that those who attend these peace conferences not only accept war but just pretend to want to change its nature. She is convinced that many pacifists, Esperantists, lawyers, and generally those who prefer nonviolence to violence will be needed in approaching other individuals or groups to keep the perversity and cynicism out of these conferences.

While Frederick and Lodewijk kept up with the progress of Wilhelm Molly and Gustave Roy, and Jeanne and her mother tried to keep up with international events in the workers'

associations, another international action was brought to a successful conclusion. Support for Francisco Ferrer including from Anatole France and Ernst Haeckel exerted considerable pressure on the Spanish government. The pedagogue was released, and his schools reopened. Francisco Ferrer had been imprisoned for thirteen months without any legal justification.

Mayor Smetz is aware of Wilhelm Molly's Esperanto dream but keeps his distance. However, there are plans for the new public school. He also orders a consolidation of all the area's police regulations. You could call it a kind of separate code of law, which is another sign that he, too, continues to strive for independence.

Meanwhile, Hotel Bergerhoff has found a new home after the brief casino episode. Lodewijk and Frederick regularly swap their usual local pub for the Bergerhoff, where the Esperanto meetings take place. These meetings are primarily intended to practice the language together and to win over more people. This leeds Gustave Roy to present Moresnet at the World Congress in Dresden as if the state with Esperanto as its official language was already a reality. A congress is always a good place to get excited about everything and all things, and in the heat of the meetings, Kelmis has already been confirmed as the host city for the next World Congress. But the Central Bureau is more cautious. It quickly establishes that only 3% of the population speaks Esperanto. Although no other country can boast such a percentage, this makes Moresnet unlikely to become an Esperanto-speaking state in the near future.

It's not just pacifists and Esperantists who are pushing for more international action. The industrial world is also showing signs of interest in international cooperation and exchange, though always with capitalist undertones. While there is a lot of exchange, industrial patents are well-protected, and only wealthy companies and entrepreneurs succeed in effectively monetising new inventions. Jeanne and Lodewijk have often discussed the prizes Alfred Nobel established in his name by bequeathing his personal fortune to a fund after his death. They know that the engineer and inventor was primarily interested in rewarding scientific research and literature. From Parisian friends, they heard that it was perhaps Bertha von Suttner who persuaded her former employer and correspondent to also provide a peace prize. After all, maintaining peace is the core of international relations, isn't it?

In Belgium, too the major industrialist Solvay continues to provide funding to researchers. Jeanne considers it a sign of the times that the industrialist is simultaneously using the proceeds from his patents for the *Solvay Institute for Sociology* and for the *Institute for Physics and Chemistry.* Pacifists, Esperantists, labour movements, and wealthy entrepreneurs are all interested in studying and understanding society.

Svante Arrhenius is one of the scientists who once received a grant from the Solvay Institute. Jeanne first heard her father speak of him in connection to Walthère Spring and his warnings about the dangers of carbon dioxide to the atmosphere. Although rumour has it that, as a member of the Nobel Committee, he favours friends and doesn't use strictly scientific

criteria. But his findings, recently published in *Worlds in the making. The evolution of the universe* is something to take seriously. When Jeanne and Lodewijk talk about the *active school* of Peeters or the rationalist *Modern School* of Ferrer, they think about approaching knowledge experimentally, also with young children. This certainly happens in *workshop schools*, like that experiment in Lisbon. The *Pure Life* movement or the philosophical approach of pedagogues of the *New Education* is of course important. But if the goal is to provide new generations with a solid scientific foundation, how can we bring the knowledge of Nobel Prize winners and other high-calibre researchers into the classroom?

Lodewijk had already read large parts of *Worlds in the making* and thinks that certain statements by Svante Arrhenius are certainly easy subjects to study, especially in high school. He gives the example: "At one point, Svante Arrhenius says: '*The idea that atmospheric envelopes limit heat loss from planets was proposed around 1800 by the great French physicist Fourier. His ideas were subsequently further developed by Pouillet and Tyndall. Their theory was called the greenhouse theory, because they believed the atmosphere behaved similarly to greenhouse windows.This principle can easily be replicated in the classroom. All you need to do is build an incubator. Then you could use the following statement to conduct some experiments with the young people: If the amount of carbon dioxide [CO2 + H2O → H2CO3 (carbonic acid)] If the amount of in the air were to fall to half its current level, the temperature would decrease by about 4°C; a reduction to a quarter would lower the temperature by 8°C. On the*

other hand, every doubling of the percentage of carbon dioxide in the air would raise the Earth's surface temperature by 4°C; and if the amount of carbon dioxide were to be quadrupled, the temperature would rise by 8°C.'."

"Can you do experiments like that?" asks Jeanne.

"I'm not a chemistry expert, but we could certainly ask colleagues if it's possible to perform a simple experiment that demonstrates that carbon dioxide and carbon dioxide gas affect the temperature in a greenhouse. And also to design an experiment to show what happens when a solution is saturated. That could then provide a basis for understanding the following statement: *'Although the sea, by absorbing carbonic acid, acts as a regulator of enormous capacity, absorbing about five-sixths of the carbonic acid produced, we nevertheless recognise that the small percentage of carbonic acid in the atmosphere has been noticeably altered in the course of a few centuries by the progress of industry*'. We can also read Svante Arrhenius' optimism and consider whether or not this optimism for the future is without danger. After all, he says: *'Because warm periods alternate with glacial periods, even after humans first appeared on Earth, we must ask ourselves: is it likely that in the coming geological eras we will be visited by a new glacial period that will push us beyond our limits? There seems little basis for such a fear. The massive combustion of coal by our industrial plants is enough to noticeably increase the percentage of carbon dioxide in the air.*' He is, in a sense, reassuring those who see the enormous amounts of burning coal as equivalent to the consequences of a volcanic eruption and how it affects life. But Arrhenius apparently assumes that

gradual warming only benefits the cold regions of the Earth, while having no impact on the already warmer regions. He says: '*Due to the influence of the increasing percentage of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, we may hope to enjoy centuries of more equable and improved climates, especially in the colder regions of the earth, periods in which the earth will produce far more abundant crops than ever before, for the benefit of a rapidly reproducing humanity*'. I don't know if you can prove that with some kind of experiment. But it would be good to be able to do so."
Jeanne looks surprised: "I could follow you until your last argument. But now I think Svante Arrhenius is just as enthusiastic about the physical evolution of the Earth as you and my father are about the linguistic evolution of humanity. What Esperanto is to you is carbonic acid to Arrhenius. Perhaps the reality is a bit more complex. It seems to me that Arrhenius is merely wearing chemical glasses when he looks at the Earth. Is it really true that the planet can be heated unevenly? And if the cold regions warm up, what happens to the ice at the North and South Poles? Does it melt? And if it melts, does the sea level rise, or does it fall? And doesn't that have a different impact on the places where people live? In Ostend, they already know how difficult it is to keep the polders dry with dikes; just imagine having to do this with a rising sea. But I absolutely agree with you that these kinds of discussions should be held with young people at school."

"Have you ever heard of Karl May?" Julien asks as he enters Frederick and Annie's house. Annie and Lodewijk immediately shake their heads, but Frederick and Jeanne look at each other.

“Don’t you remember your grandmother talking about him?” Frederick asks hesitantly. Jeanne nods and says, “I even believe there was a book by him in the library in the last years of the Barn, *Winnetou the Red Gentleman*, but I'm not sure. It’s also possible I saw that with Edward.

Julien continues: “Yes, that’s the man. He’s written many travel stories, some of which are set in America. And now I received a letter from a cousin who emigrated to Albany. He says Karl May was received with great honour there among the German-speaking population. Apparently, he toured eastern North America for several weeks. He admitted there that he’d never been to the Wild West.”

“If I remember correctly,” Jeanne says hesitantly, “he did point the finger for the decline of the Indian population mainly at the greed of Europeans emigrating to America in search of land and gold, especially after the so-called *gold rush* of the 1849 generation.”

“That’s somewhat true,” says Julien, “but he has a primarily evangelical view of Europe’s relationship with the naturalists, as he calls them. He attributes great abilities to them, but always says they do little for their souls, despite all their spirituality. A strange character, that man.”

“We could suggest he sail up the Congo River sometime,” Lodewijk jokes. “As you’ve probably heard, Congo Free State will be annexed by Belgium, and the territory will thus become Belgian Congo. I don’t know what this will mean for the local population or whether they will be freed from forced labour, but what I do know from those who have family living in Congo is that they will simply continue working there, now as official civil

servants of the Belgian state. It even seems that the Congolese will be ‘advised’ to work for the colonial companies. Perhaps Karl May could write a good moral book about this.”

About a year after this conversation, the Esperanto supporters of Moresnet are at the Bergerhoff Hotel, to discuss the cancelled conference in Moresnet.
Barcelona had been designated as the venue for the international conference, despite the tragic events that resulted more from the attitude of arrogant colonists than from the rioters of the summer months. The riots were sparked by the Spanish government’s mobilisation of Catalan reservists in preparation for a colonial war against Morocco. Anarchists and socialists called for international solidarity among workers, which in turn provoked a general strike followed by street riots.
Among the Esperantists of Moresnet, there are discussions about the neutrality of the Esperanto movement. Can this neutrality go so far as to hold its congress under the honorary chairmanship of the Spanish king, whose government arrested people, including Esperantists on vague charges after the uprisings? The discussion also concerns how far a pacifist can go when knowing they might be drawn into a war. And, someone says, responding to a call for defense like Jaurés does, is different from having to take a stand against the arrogant colonialist offensives of one’s own government. It is, of course, always difficult to balance general human solidarity against the pursuit of profit, especially when the ignorance of many leads to the rapid rise of leaders who are often not immune to the spell of money and power that quickly create exceptional positions.

But the world congress did take place in Barcelona. Although there is more discreet discussion about the role of the Esperanto movement in national conflicts in which Esperantists might be involved, there is a feeling that advocating neutrality and establishing a state with Esperanto as its official language could be contradictory. How do you preserve the intended neutral transnational character of the language in such a case?
No, *Amikejo* is hardly spoken or written about in *La Revuo* or in *Lingvo Internacia*, the two magazines that Frederick and Lodewijk regularly read. The conference in Barcelona was in September, the one in Moresnet was scheduled for November, but few people showed up. They were mainly curious people from neighbouring countries, more interested in learning more about Esperanto. It was certainly not an international gathering of Esperantists.

During the same period, more information emerges about the execution of anarchists at Montjuïc Castle in Barcelona.
"So Ferrer was simply executed on the orders of the Spanish government," Jeanne concludes.
"What is despicable is that the conservatives used the riots in Barcelona, which they called *Tragic Week* to accuse Ferrer of participation, even though he wasn't even in Spain at the time," Lodewijk notes. "For me, that's the essence of the arrogance of power. The government simply used its power to accuse someone of acts he couldn't possibly have committed. This isn't to say that Ferrer didn't take positions that disagreed with those of others, but those in power who call themselves democratic could hardly sentence him to death for that. So they resorted to

what they thought were more persuasive arguments to appease reactions."

"But that didn't happen," Jeanne notes. "Even before his execution, protests against the death sentence came from everywhere, and they even tried to convince Alfonso XIII personally not to sign the verdict. It is said that Ferrer claimed his innocence before the firing squad and that *Long Live the Modern School* were his last words."

"What a dangerous profession ours can be," Lodewijk remarks. "Apparently, as far as we know, your ancestors were never in any great danger, but…"

"…not in danger, no… it's only said of Dieudonné Lemaître and Mathilde Larouge that they fled Paris to avoid capture, or worse. They were Jan's parents, who, together with Madeleine, ran that schoolhouse in Oostende we once discussed with Edward."

Lodewijk says: "I was thinking more of the Inquisition trials against schoolmasters who were imprisoned and removed from office. I thought of schools being closed, people being cursed in church, teachers being silenced or whose works were confiscated or banned. And now Ferrer being shot dead for proposing a school that the ultra-conservative Catholic leaders are viciously criticising. Their 'democracy' remains very limited to agreeing only to what they themselves agree to."

Julien, who is following the conversation, then adds: "Auguste Beernaert won the Nobel Peace Prize for his proposals on arbitration in conflict situations. Bertha von Suttner received the prize for her advocacy for dialogue instead of violence in international relations. Perhaps the time has come to

demonstrate that this kind of dialogue and arbitration is also necessary at the national level as part of democratic forms of government? And, incidentally, with the widespread use of schools, perhaps it would be better to provide arbitration for teachers as well, otherwise we might see them fighting each other one day."
Jeanne nods sadly: "What you're saying now, Julien, is unfortunately not so improbable. In academic circles, the line between free discussion and insult is very blurred. The arrogance of power often repels new ideas, even in natural sciences and even if it turns out later those new ideas describe nature better than previous hypotheses. There's a trail of arrogance, persecution, and even manslaughter throughout the history of knowledge formation. Imagine what that could mean for sociological studies, or now that the study of the psyche is gaining its place as a psychological science. Arbitration will probably be necessary, and dialogue is always necessary, I think."

A few weeks later, news reached Moresnet that King Leopold II died. He had reportedly arranged his civil marriage with his young companion, Blanche Delacroix, just before his death. His nephew Albert takes over as king as Albert I. It quickly becomes clear that the new king and Queen Elisabeth are strongly committed to art and science. In Belgium, the Flemish community also notes that Albert is the first to take the royal oath also in Dutch.

Jeanne tells us that Paul Geheeb divorced his first spouse and

married Edith de Cassirer. In April 1910, they opened the *Odenwaldschule*. Paul is a well-known figure in the *Pure Life* movement and once considered Abbotsholme a model. The institution he is now launching with Edith is immediately sparking interest among educators. The school is characterised by co-education, a highly flexible learning path, and the co-management given to the students. Co-management gradually seems to be a proposal from more educators. Jeanne heard about it from Ligthart. Decroly and Dewey also work on it, and now Paul Geheeb is incorporating co-management into his school's organisation.

The least you can say is that the people of the *active school* question the simultaneous teaching and instruction of the sit-and-listen-school in various ways and develop alternative concrete forms for the general school.

In Portugal as the Republicans gain more leeway the *Association for Pedagogical Studies* is founded by those who examine Portugal's education needs from a sociological and pedagogical perspective and then develop ambitious plans. These include Adolfo Lima, António Sergio, and Delfim Santos, as well as Faria de Vasconcelos, whom Jeanne heard about from her grandmother. The ongoing debates aim to generate innovative ideas.

As a result of her correspondence with Edward Peeters, Jeanne gradually develops her own opinion about the *Pure Life* movement, more specifically about the way in which Ghent *Life reform*-group tries to create a link between workers and intellectuals. As far as she can tell, the rapprochement that Vera

Tondeur brought about between *Pure Life* and *de Flinken (the nimble)* some marriages between members of both associations. Although some male *Pure Life* members clearly profile themselves as socialists, Jeanne sees that it is the women who are committed to co-education and the defense of women's rights, in addition to vegetarianism. According to Jeanne, it is also mainly the women of *The Nimble* who see education and upbringing as a means to achieve their goal. Jeanne doesn't know whether *The Nimble* contributed to the opening of the country's first children's library in Ghent, but she very much appreciates this initiative of the *Association of Ghent Women*.

A message from England reminds Jeanne of her conversation with Julien about the arbitration of conflicts between teachers. Apparently, some teachers, and in this case even their Minister of Education, continue to speak in favour of the possibility of spanking children at school as a means of coercion… for what purpose? To learn? Or to forget? Jeanne remains suspicious of anyone who claims that children can be forced by coercion into an education, even when it concerns moral values. Can a child who is spanked be convinced that corporal punishment is not a means of persuasion in an argument? In any case, the English Minister of Education, when questioned about the sometimes harsh approach in primary schools, appears to say that it is neither necessary nor appropriate to recommend the abolition of corporal punishment. He himself would speak out *flogging*, so flogging has been used. School principals must have the necessary discretion, he says, and he is convinced that, generally speaking, that discretion is not abused. Therefore, the minister

does not advocate an absolute ban, even for very young children. He believes his role is limited to recommendations and he only states that these types of punishments are recorded in an *ad hoc* register.
Jeanne thinks about this for a long time. It's certainly positive that the minister isn't imposing any orders or prohibitions. And does he maintain the same attitude when discussing co-education or religious education? When it comes to other working models where children are offered co-management by teachers? Does he promote discussion about controversial positions? Does he provide arbitration in such discussions? Those would be good steps, according to Jeanne. The question then remains, of course, whether, as an authority in a democracy, one is allowed to or should prohibit things. Isn't an inhumane practice like flogging children the result of (pedagogical) ignorance? What can you do as long as that ignorance persists among leaders? Not the simple *Ten Commandments* avoid the rise to arrogant abuse of power. *Thou shalt not (strike a child)* is a simple commandment, putting it into practice is certainly not easy. And one probably won't get a wipping teachers to engage in dialogue by whipping them…

The contacts between the Belgian royal couple and Ernest Solvay, patron of the Free University of Brussels, provided an additional impetus toward a more dialogue-oriented scientific world. At the end of October 1911, a large group of scientists, invited by Ernest Solvay and Henri Lorenz, gathered in Brussels to consider one of the most pressing discussions in the scientific community at the time: "the theory of radiation and quanta."

Frederick had a former colleague explained the topic. Light is apparently a natural phenomenon full of surprises. The conference is therefore designed as a meeting and discussion platform for prominent figures from the fields of physics and chemistry. Frederick knows the names of Max Planck, Ernest Rutherford, Maria Skłodowska-Curie, Henri Poincaré, and Albert Einstein, but the other attendees are less familiar to him. King Albert and Queen Elisabeth also attend a formal ceremony. But the most important thing, of course, is the discussions and their publication. According to Frederick's same former colleague, this conference will be a remarkable event, and in various universities much people have already shown enormous interest for reading the expected minutes. This is entirely in line with Ernest Solvay's conviction that the happiness of humanity stems from the spread of knowledge.

Jeanne notes that the supposed holders of this knowledge currently come mainly from northwestern Europe. She believes the way the school and university are being developed plays a role in this. The conference features mostly German names, a few French ones, and there are also some scientists from Austria, Denmark, the Netherlands, Great Britain, and Belgium. No one from the Americas, Africa, or Asia. Nor is there anyone present from the southern European countries, which for centuries were the centers of power but never invested in universal education. And today in Spain, conservatives control the school system, and there is considerable reluctance to embrace new scientific ideas. In Portugal, republican governments succeed one another in rapid succession, often

lacking coherence in establishing an educational network. Yet, one of these provisional governments praised the Freemason initiative called *Workshop School*. According to that school, the structural elements are numerous. Traditional classrooms are transformed into workshops, laboratories, workspaces, and kitchens. There are no steps or raised areas for teachers. Benches have been replaced by regular tables and chairs. Handicrafts support all subjects. All school rituals such as grades, exams, prizes, punishments, and graduation ceremonies are avoided. There are no holidays or public holidays. The school year runs from January to December. Class trips are incorporated as an educational element. There are exhibitions of schoolwork at the end of the school year. Students unite in "solidárias". Jeanne thinks her grandmother would have found this approach interesting. But for the rest the government can praise such an initiative but lacks the resources to use it as a model for the primary school network that desperately needs to be expanded.

At the end of November of the same year, Frederick reads in *Humanité*, the newspaper of which Paul Lafargue [See *Enlightened Citizens School*] regularly edited the editorial, that he and his wife Laura Marx committed suicide on their estate in Draveil. He reportedly left a short message that read: '*Being healthy in body and mind, I commit suicide before the merciless old age which is robbing me one by one of the joys and pleasures of existence and which is robbing me of my physical and intellectual strength, paralysing my energy, breaking my will and making me a burden to myself and to others*.' Frederick notes that you can

only guess whether Laura thought the same way.

There is clearly unrest in Europe. Both warmongers and pacifists are constantly at work. Some initiatives are rather unexpected, such as that of the *Academic Association for Music and Literature* in Vienna who invites Karl May to give a lecture with the somewhat high-flown title *Empor ins Reich der Edelmenschen* (*On to the realm of the noble people*), where the speaker meets Bertha Von Suttner.

In Basel, the socialists and social democrats of Europe attempted to mobilise the working population for an international countermeasure against the Balkan Wars and the resulting war plans of the elites and governments. These Balkan Wars, between the divided Christian monarchies resulting from the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, had already reached Central Europe. A confused network of alliances, resulting from agreements and family ties, further increased the tensions. In March-April 1912, the protagonists were forced to moderate their conflicts following the advance of the rulers of Austria-Hungary in the Balkans. One camp, consisting of Serbia, Bulgaria, Russia, Montenegro, and Greece, positioned itself against the Ottoman Empire and the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

At the same time, the leaders of the international socialist organisation responded to a call from the Swiss socialists to dedicate a conference in Basel to the threats of war. At the end of November, Frederick and his friends read the results of that conference. A unanimous resolution, drafted by Victor Adler (Austria), August Bebel (Germany), Jean Jaurès (France), James Keir-Hardie (England), and Gheorghi Plekhanoff

(Russia), states: *'The Congress calls on the socialist parties to continue their action vigorously by all means they deem appropriate…'* Jean Jaurès succeeds with his appeal *'War on war'* to clearly define the diversity of means to combat war. The resolution itself seems to demonstrate some unanimity among the reformist and revolutionary currents of the Socialist International against the threat of imperialist war. In December 1912, it suddenly seemed that the Basel appeal was succeeding. Large demonstrations took place almost everywhere in Europe.
But Frederick and Louis believe it's a flash in the pan. It takes until July 1913 for the Treaty of Bucharest to end the open conflict. And it looks like the treaty will be short-lived. Meanwhile, it's abundantly clear that even within the socialist front, opinions differ from country to country. National glorification appeals strongly to the population; the German Social Democrats, for example, are much less inclined to international protest against the threat of war. At the same time, the French nationalists are casting doubt on Jaurès, asking whether he might be a spy for the German Emperor.
Frederick tells his son-in-law that both governments are cleverly using the previous Franco-German war to keep hostile feelings between the two nations alive. He is convinced that remaining as neutral as possible at this time is perhaps the best position. Therefore, he remains enthusiastic about the *Amikejo*-project for Moresnet and he thinks it is a good thing that, just as in the previous Franco-German war, the Belgian royal family and the Belgian government, like the Dutch government, are pushing for strict neutrality.

Today, there the discussion about organising the centennial of Neutral Moresnet is quite open. Jeanne finds it odd that so many people who are capable of reasoning consider a *condominium* that isn't democratically governed a reason to organize a celebration. But Lodewijk sides with his father-in-law. Both claim this is yet more proof that, after a century of hesitation, people finally want independence. Jeanne notes that her only doubt is whether the administrators of *Vieille-Montagne* actually want such independence. How would such a country survive, without any other sources of income? From Esperanto tourism? But Lodewijk is stubborn and is spending more and more time in Moresnet. Since last year, he has held a position in Welkenraedt, while Jeanne and the children remain in Liège. On weekends and holidays, they often travel by train to Welkenraedt, where they pick up Lodewijk and then take the train to Kelmis together.

And so, the fateful year of 1914 dawned also for the Demeester family. During spring, discussions still focused on international affairs. Frederick reports that the transition from the Congo Free State to the Belgian Congo wasn't as beneficial to the Congolese population as people would have us believe. While King Albert I's attitude toward the African territory differs from his uncle's, ultimately, as Cattier says, Congo remained primarily an economic enterprise. The Congolese who were requisitioned for major infrastructure projects in the Free State's final months were under the same pressure to work for Belgian economic interests. Frederick grimly notes that the stories of severe population decline weren't fantasy, as is now evident. To

ensure a sufficient workforce, people were brought in from other regions. Whether this always happened properly and in accordance with the rules of the anti-trafficking treaties is far from clear, he says.

Julien follows in *Humanité* Jean Jaurès' initiatives against the increasing militarisation of France. The socialist leader mobilised against military spending and the law that brings military service to three years. He proposed a military reorganisation. This would be a people's army, solely for defense, consisting of well-trained and educated militias. He is often viewed with suspicion. But he truly causes a stir when he proposes talks with the German Reich about Alsace and a regional solution with an autonomy arrangement.

Even the most staunch pacifists are beginning to fear that the efforts of neutral organisation like the Esperantists, the Solvay Conferences, and the more political efforts of treaties and international conferences like that of *The Hague* will be no match for the all-consuming war industry. It is clear to everyone that steel production primarily supplies the heavy armaments industry. *Si vis bellum para bellum.*

At the beginning of June, Jeanne receives a letter from Edward Peeters who, for once, does not mention the *Pure Life* movement or the *active school*, not even his Minerva-magazine. The story is about the family of his former student Lucien Souris. Lucien is now studying in Ghent or may have already been conscripted. His father is with a steam trawler of the *Pêcheries aux Vapeurs*, under the authority of Arseen Blondé somewhere on the Congo River, and now disaster struck the female half of the family. The

local newspapers are full of it: Lucien's younger sister had left her parents' house a few months earlier to live with her lover, a very jealous man. Shortly after the birth of their daughter, she couldn't bear it any longer and returned to Oostende with her baby, where she moved in with her mother. That proved fatal. Her lover followed her, and after a brief argument, he shot her. He then shot himself in the head. The Souris family is quite well-known in the fishing community, as well as among the Ostend lower middle class. Edward, who lives around the corner, heard about the tragedy before the newspapers reported it. Together with a colleague who also had Lucien in his class, they took it upon themselves to inform him before the papers did. His father would be informed by radio telegraph during his return from Africa. Meanwhile, Edward also learns that Lucien's murdered sister's daughter will be named Lucienne. She lives with her grandmother, and Lucien is her godfather.

At the end of the same month of June, another assassination has more serious consequences. This time, it is not the act of a jealous lover, but a political ploy against Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife. A young man shoots them both dead. Riots do break out in Austria, and Serbian shops are looted, but the Emperor shows little emotion over the death of his successor. The two men were not on good terms. On the one hand, the Emperor considered Franz Ferdinand too modern. Moreover, he had pushed through with his desire to marry a member of the lower nobility, a fact he was strongly reproached for in aristocratic circles. At first, it seems like it would fizzle out. But Frederick and Lodewijk are not reassured. They believe the

warmongers will use the attack as a pretext for new war activities in the Balkans. Things will be much worse than they anticipate. The first sign of this comes on July 20th in Moresnet itself. Mayor Smetz reveals that he was contacted by a French newspaper inquiring about the anniversary preparations. The mayor manages to tell the city council that Germany sees no reason for an anniversary. Jeanne seems to be right. Why should a *condominium* that hasn't been resolved after a century be celebrated? Frederick discusses the matter with Wilhelm Molly. He believes the Prussian leaders are merely urging the mayor to exercise caution, but Frederick sees this as an indication that Prussia intends to incorporate the neutral territory into the German Empire. Industrial interests could be at stake, he adds. Since the King of the Belgians points to Belgium's obligated neutrality, and the German government will likely be interested in zinc production, *Vieille-Montagne* may see greater profit in producing on German territory than in neutral territory. But Wilhelm says he remains optimistic and that with more people in the region speaking Esperanto, their position will be stronger.
Emperor Franz Joseph himself didn't cause a major uproar over his nephew's death, but the Austrian military leadership nevertheless issued a kind of ultimatum to Serbia. The murder had to be clarified, and for this, Serbia had to give the Austrian authorities free rein. The Serbian government conceded, but there was one aspect of the ultimatum that was technically questionable, as it could call the territory's sovereignty into question. The more belligerent officers used this remark to further incite the tension. When Frederick read about the

problems surrounding the ultimatum on July 25th, he was almost certain that forces within the German Empire were working to convince Austria to declare war on Serbia. This would mean that France and Russia would have to support Serbia, giving Germany a reason to wage war as an ally of Austria. According to Frederick, this is all due to the Emperor's desire to further expand his colonial empire, which is very small.

Jean Jaurès is one who does not give up hope that war can be averted, despite the French labour movement's rather lukewarm enthusiasm for international pacifism. Jaurès continues to try to convince the government that France has little to gain from intervening in the Balkan war based on treaties with Russia and Serbia and that it would be better to continue encouraging dialogue. But nationalist propaganda is stronger than that calling for international workers' solidarity. This propaganda influences Raoul Villain, who shoots Jaurès through the window of the *Café du Croissant* on the evening of July 31st.

Frederick is dismayed to hear the news that France is mobilising. Louis and Frederick wonder if they shouldn't advise their friends and acquaintances to leave the region and flee to Belgium or the Netherlands. They believe it's completely uncertain now what will happen to Moresnet's neutrality while Belgian and Dutch neutrality are assured.

But they didn't have time to organize anything. On August 4th, Prussia declared war on neutral Belgium, and early that morning the German army captured Moresnet within half an hour. They then continue on to Liège, where Jeanne and the children are. In a short time, all communication is lost: the

trains aren't running and there is no telegraph or telephone connection. Jeanne knows nothing about her parents or her husband, and they, in turn, have no news of her.

The German Empire simply takes possession of Moresnet and its inhabitants immediately receive German citizenship. Anyone who refuses this is a potential enemy. Wilhelm Molly, who twice served as a medical officer in the Prussian army, is left alone, but the young men suddenly granted German citizenship are forced into the army. Like other potential enemies Frederick and Louis are forced to work. The administrators of *Vieille-Montagne* are granted special status, ensuring that the supply of German coal does not jeopardise zinc production. This production is entirely allocated to the German occupiers. Therefore, the existing railway lines must be maintained in good condition, while plans are already underway for a new railway line, primarily to supply the occupying army. Within a few months that occupying army has become entrenched in a stalemate along a long front line. The other side consists of entrenched Belgian, French, and British soldiers. Because of their place of residence, the residents of Kelmis who do not want German citizenship are perhaps slightly better off than the civilians in nearby villages and on the road to Verviers and Liège, who are shot without warning if they are suspected of espionage or sabotage, or simply in retaliation.

But suddenly the atmosphere turns grim. Apparently, neutrality that is not turning a blind eye to the occupying forces is bad neutrality. An Esperantist can very easily be suspected of acts of sabotage. A problem on the morning of October 26 1914 with a switch on the railway line to Kelmis is immediately dismissed as

an attack against the established authorities. Workers are executed. Among them are Frederick, 70 years old, and Lodewijk, 38 years old. Both die the same day that, in Saint-Césaire, France, a young teacher, Célestin Freinet, receives his first temporary position. He replaces the local teacher who is called up for military service.
Jeanne, who managed to escape death with the children in Liège, hears in mid-November from Julien's daughter, who fled and arrived in Liège, that her father and husband had been shot. Julien is also dead. The inhabitants of the farm are no more. Some were put under German arms, some are dead, others may have escaped to France. No one can tell Jeanne anything about her mother, Annie. With a small group of women and children, Jeanne wants to flee towards the coast. It is said that the Belgian troops there succeeded in stopping the Germans and that one can reach Oostende via the Dutch province of Zeeland. But others dispute this. Nevertheless, Jeanne considers fleeing to the Netherlands. But when her group arrives in Tienen, she learns that the German troops have electrified the Dutch-Belgian border. Lodewijk's family receives the entire group of women with whom she had started the march from Liège. She remains there with her children for the rest of the war. She never heard anything more of her mother. Many years later, Louis would learn that an Annie Dehaan was registered as deceased in December 1918 in Welkenraedt.

Only a few years after the armistice it did become clear how many civilians were killed by the advancing German army, in violation of all treaties and agreements. Nothing was taken into

account. Moreover, in a kind of ruthless frenzy of power, arrogance, and ignorance, all sense of class solidarity, let alone human solidarity, was swept away. Thanks to nationalistic manipulation, the elite had hundreds of thousands of workers' and farmers' sons to murder each other in often pointless assaults on a few meters of terrain in the middle of the muddy plains during a war of attrition.

What Jeanne told Louis

The war is over. In Paris, preparations are underway to discuss reparations in the coming months. But Jeanne is largely unaware of this. On her forty-third birthday in July, it becomes clear once again she can't get over Lodewijk's death. As the eldest of the children, Louis, sees how his mother suffers from his father's absence, and he also understands that staying at his father's family farm is keeping an open wound. That's why he promised his mother that as soon as the war is over, he would contact Edward Peeters and figure out how they could move to Oostende together. And by July, if rumours from France were to be believed, the end wasn't so far off. And so, Louis' hope flares up when, on November 11th at 11 a.m., the end of the war is officially announced. In Tienen, one still kept stumbling over German soldiers, so to speak. Only on November 23rd the war is truly over here too.

And now, just a few months later, disaster strikes again. It began with a high fever. Jeanne developed severe muscle pain throughout her body. She had overexerted herself caring for and

supporting refugees and distraught young German boys who often slept in the yard, she thinks. But now she is so weak that she has barely been able to speak for days. She still tries to drink and eat, but it takes so much effort that she gives up. Louis watches his mother waste away. He is filled with fear. This has nothing to do with fatigue. According to the French who pass by, the British soldiers talk about *Flanders Flu*. Later he will hear that the Dutch are talking about *Spanish Flu*. And it also has his mother in its grasp.

He's almost sixteen now, and you could say that with his father's passing, he's practically had to take over his father's role. You could call him a premature adult. These days, he doesn't leave his mother's bed. She sleeps most of the day, and he spends his time reading what she started writing when they moved to Tienen just before Christmas 1914. He doesn't remember if that was the saddest Christmas ever. What he does know is that he only has vague memories of pleasant Christmases in Kelmis. The last time was in 1913 when he was ten years old. It seems like centuries ago.

It's sometimes difficult to find a chronological line in everything Jeanne wrote during these last four years. Louis understands that she often writes back in time based on a specific message or memory. Yet he finds almost no notes from before 1904. Fortunately, Jeanne introduces most of her notes with a date. Since mid-August and until the fever kept Jeanne bedridden, the days had been exciting and sometimes even enjoyable. Louis had let Jeanne know that he wanted to become a primary school teacher, so Jeanne had told him a lot about her

grandmother, about her trips to England and Ostend, about Edward, about Ferrière, about Ferrer, about Ovide Decroly. After that, she had given him the notebooks he is now reading. Until the day before yesterday, he often interrupted his reading to ask his mother questions about what he had just read. But that has become difficult now. He reads and rereads, looking up anxiously every time he hears Jeanne's breathing change:

I recently heard about the inauguration of the Royal Athenaeum in Oostende while reading reports about King Leopold II and Oostende. The Athenaeum's buildings are located on St. Petersburgstraat, where the King's summer church used to be. What struck me is that the inauguration is dated October 8, 1901. I seem to remember Edward telling me that before he became a teacher in Oostende, he worked in the Athenaeum for a while as a supervisor. That would have been in a different building. I'll ask him.

It's strange I don't remember anything about that inauguration. It must have been shortly after that time when Lodewijk and I were in Oostende just before we got married. So we spent fourteen years together. A bit more, if you count the times we were together before we got married. While Grandma Johanna and Grandpa Henri had been together for 56 years and had met before too… Life is cruel. But I still remember the boat trip with Lodewijk when I came back from Abbotsholme and Bedales. Wasn't that where they recommended to read something by John Dewey? And look, I found a quote from him here that I read with Louis at my breast.

I've often been asked why some teachers who have never studied the art of teaching are nevertheless exceptionally

good teachers. The explanation is simple. They have a quick, sure, and undiminished sympathy for the workings and processes of the minds they encounter. Their own minds move in harmony with those of others, appreciating their difficulties, engaging their problems, and sharing their intellectual victories. How true that is when I think of Grandma Johanna's work. She never really had an education like I had, and I learned so much from her. She was so committed to the intellectual exchange between adults and children in her Children's Republic at the Barn.
And then we heard about the work of Ovide Decroly. I think it was Edward who first mentioned it to me, but I know Grandma Johanna also gave me notes about him. What would he be doing right now, in this crazy war we're going through? I wonder if, if things had gone differently, I wouldn't have visited him to learn more.

When Louis first read the passage, he asked his mother why she found Decroly's work interesting.
Jeanne replied: "As Grandma Johanna had already explained to me, Ovide Decroly bases his work on four principles: a child learns globally, comprehensively. You must allow a child to approach something in its entirety, after which you can analyse it. This leads to the second principle, that you must take the child's interests as a guide. Everything that occurs in their natural environment can lead to discoveries. This brings us to the third principle. The classroom or school must be a workshop, a laboratory in which a child can act instead of sitting quietly listening. That is also what Dewey says; it is the *active class* Edward is talking about. And that's why Ovide Decroly

says, and this brings us to the fourth principle, that the school is actually everywhere. The school is all the children's workplaces, and so is the kitchen, the shop, the street, the studio. The classroom is that workshop where you can move from the concrete to the abstract.
"But is that possible, Mom?" Louis remembers exactly what he asked.
"That is possible," Jeanne had replied, "as soon as it is clear what a teacher is and what position he occupies."

Louis rereads what Jeanne wrote about this:

I don't know of any book by Ovide Decroly where he discusses the role and place of the teacher, but I do remember that lecture I attended a few years after the founding of the École de l'Hermitage. The educational world was so angry with him. Much angrier even than with Edward, who ultimately remained relatively quiet in his little place in Oostende. But Ovide, with his basic principles, his co-education, the support of progressive citizens, a Freemason to boot, no, he had to face criticism from the instruction teacher. And yet the message is clear: a child doesn't learn on its own. It is not Rousseau's Emile. As a teacher, it's about understanding in which direction a child is thinking, after a discovery or an observation, and how you direct that observation toward knowledge. A teacher knows and directs, and that's not the same as instructing a limited body of knowledge.

I often think back to the ten years before the war began. What a rich library of newspapers and magazines we had back then! Edward was, of course, a great source of

information, but there were the various magazines that told us about what Tot 't Nut *in the Netherlands published. We had the* Pure Life-*Movement, we heard so much about Ferrer, often also the terrible inventions of that conservative group that doesn't allow anyone to think or act differently than they want. And especially wants to keep the poor in poverty. We received texts from that peculiar figure Rudolf Steiner who, on the one hand, with his* Wahrheit und Wissenschaft *seems to promote free thought, yet was stuck in a theosophical framework of the soul. Just before the war, I came across an interesting text from which I understood Rudolf Steiner renounced theosophy and embarked on a new direction of thought he calls anthroposophy. I hope I'll be able to read more about this when the mad slaughter is over. It's one of the things I'd love to talk to Edward about. What is the connection between Pure Life, Lebensreform, and that anthroposophy? Perhaps there isn't. I do know that Steiner was very critical of Darwin and that he held a creationist view, but that might be a result of his earlier affiliation with theosophy; I don't know.*

Louis pauses for a moment, looking at his sleeping mother and remembering the question he asked then: "Why do you want to talk to Edward about this?"

It was one evening in late August when they were sitting together in the courtyard in front of the stairs leading to their rooms, not long before that endless procession of French refugees preceded the retreating German troops.

"Your father and I have always kept out of the church atmosphere. As you know, you and your brother and sister were

not baptised and that was a conscious decision, for which we were often criticised. But we do have many friends who are Christian believers. And Edward is one of them. We think that Edward has a clear view of his faith and that he does not like dogmatic thinking. Most people of the *Pure Life* movement is very strict in adhering to its own precepts, but they're not dogmatic about it. Edward sometimes mentioned that someone like Jan Ligthart faced strong criticism, from Theo Thijssen, for example. But you can't say he held esoteric views, says Edward, and in the correspondence we once had about Steiner, I think in 1913 or perhaps early 1914, he expressed some doubts about theosophical and anthroposophical ideas. But there was little information available at the time. I hope Edward and Steiner survive the war and that we can perhaps discuss it again next year.

The boy resumes his reading after another glance at his mother and smiles as he reads the next lines.

I was getting really annoyed by the way everyone in Belgium is involved in education without even having a Ministry of Education or Upbringing. Now there was the establishment of a Ministry again. The Higher Council for Technical Education *by the Ministry of Labour and Industry. There was interest, but you can hardly speak about a good public primary school. But, I said, I was getting annoyed when I was surprised by a message from Edward that he was in the Netherlands. I knew, of course, that he wasn't in class at the moment, but not long ago he had written that he wasn't much of a traveller and that he preferred the quiet of his office. He even wrote then that he considered it a*

shortcoming, but that whoever doesn't have one should throw the first stone. And then, suddenly, in the autumn of 1907, he wrote me he had been in the Netherlands since September. He explained it was Lodewijk van Mierop who had prepared his trip. He stayed in The Hague. There he met, among others, Jan Ligthart, and in his last letter, which I received just before the invasion made all correspondence impossible, he wrote that he felt Ligthart and Van Mierop were friends for life. Edward is clearly not alone in his enthusiasm now that he has found even more colleagues who are following in Comenius' footsteps and are thinking of a school for all children. Edward speaks enthusiastically about the Public School for the Poor in the Schilderswijk neighbourhood. Bees swarm around their hives in the schoolyard. In specially dug ditches, aquatic plants, fish, and frogs grow. The city children grow wheat and vegetables, plant trees. They even churn butter. They keep pigeons and chickens. This is how they learn to experience 'the full life', he believes. He finds common ground with his active school *in what Jan Ligthart shows and tells him. He is of course also very interested in that* Pure Life *movement in the Netherlands. I suspect he and Maria have found additional support for their vegetarianism.*

Edward then talks about Wijbrandus Haanstra, whom he visited at his teacher training college in Leiden. What he wrote to me about the methodology used, which has a lot to do with self-discovery learning, both among his students and among the preschoolers they will later work with, seems to me to align well with the reforms we advocated with and since Fröbel. Haanstra also defends the position that a teacher is not a demonstrator, but a facilitator. It would have pleased Grandma Johanna. Strange, but I never heard her mention

the monthly magazine for education, even though it has existed since 1884. To my shame, I must also admit that I never showed much interest in this magazine.

Of course, Edward is very enthusiastic in his description of his meeting with Nellie van Kol. I already knew he corresponded with that socialist educator. It was he who told me about the magazine The Woman *when we first met. Naturally, this magazine was soon included in the prohibition index of the Belgian Catholic Church. It was through that magazine that Lodewijk and I could first speak shamelessly about birth control and how to avoid pregnancy without having to abstain from sexual intercourse. But even before our marriage, the magazine ceased publication. What I didn't know was that Nellie had now converted to Christianity. At the time, she was still editor-in-chief of* Ons Blaadje (Our Leaf)*, that magazine that aims to provide good literature to working-class children at a reasonable price. Funny how words say so little. Although Catholic conservatives and the bourgeoisie are always talking about good reading,* Our Leaf *is not edifying enough. It's called seditious and socialist. Poor Nellie. Not socialist enough for the socialists, not Christian enough for some Christians. It's no wonder that her Christian inspiration led her to the Methodist Salvation Army.*

I also remember Edward's comments about the Dutch Children's Association, where he personally met Mrs. Caroline Van der Hucht. This children's association is a kind of meeting place for children and has no ties to the school. Edward tells me he had the impression it was a very open organisation, not one that was Christian-inspired, but primarily aimed to guide children to be good people who didn't bully or harm others. He said in the travelogue he sent me that he had

found examples of fröbel and slöjd there.
During his tour of the Netherlands, Edward also visited Frederik van Eeden and Ferdinand Domela Nieuwenhuis. Lodewijk had laughed when he heard about that visits. After all, it was rather unusual to see Edward in socialist and even anarchist circles. But Edward has an open mind. Oh God, what will he say when he hears that Lodewijk was executed by German war fanatics? And how will we discuss this with our German colleagues after the war? But I digress.
At Ferdinand Nieuwenhuis he heard Geert Zwaag's statement: 'thinking workers don't drink, drinking workers don't think' *which seemed to him to be completely in line with the* Pure Life *movement. Edward mentions that Ferdinand was one of the founders of the* International Antimilitarist Association *and he wrote that although he admires Nieuwenhuis he can't agree with his very atheistic stance. Would he prefer an agnostic stance? I'll have to talk to him about it when we meet again or write. A few years ago, I read the lecture Nieuwenhuis gave, in Paris I think, about what he considers a libertarian upbringing. He goes back to his roots, as others have done before him, when he says* 'Education, but what is that? The Latin word *educatio* says it well. It's composed of two words, namely *e,* out and *ducere,* to pull. It means to draw out, to pull out the innermost being. In German, the same word is used: *Erziehung*, composed of *Er* and *Ziehen*. So it is pulling something from the inside out and not the other way around bringing something from the outside in…' *I also found interesting what he says about the obstacles to free study, in which he quotes Multatuli:* 'Free study is the unhindered pursuit of truth or the absence of hindrance in the pursuit of truth.' *Multatuli points to three obstacles, says*

Nieuwenhuis, that hinder success: imposing prejudice; preventing research; and the unsuitability of the researcher. If you translate this to the teacher's work, I would say that any obstacles lie not with the researcher, but with the person supervising the children doing the research. Edward must appreciate all this, right? But from what I understand from Edward regarding his trip to the Netherlands he has been talking about Felix Ortt from the Dutch Reformed Church *who finds his master in Tolstoy, who considers the Sermon on the Mount the core of the Gospels. Ortt wrote under the title* The principle of love *a decade ago, ideas related to Christian anarchism, in which, besides Tolstoy's influence, the influence of the socialist Frederik van Eeden is also clearly noticeable. I know my mother was interested in his* Association for Common Land Ownership. *With this association he wanted to encourage workers to cooperate in managing companies.*
It was around that time, I think, that Edward decided to establish his own publishing house to publish certain works that no printer in Flanders would take on. Among them was a French translation of a work by Ortt on sexual education for children. During those years of the gradual integration of primary education, quite a bit was written about learning to write. Little was said about what was written, but mainly about how writing should be taught. And everyone had their own opinion. Calligraphy is good at first, then beautiful handwriting is out of the question. Fast, flowing writing is what needs to be practiced, so long live Callewaert's notebooks with examples. Sometimes retrieval exercises are important, sometimes not. Locke is brought in. And today, of course, there's also the authority of Doctor Montessori, who emphasises touch and the sense of movement. Sandpaper

letters are touched, and figures are shaded to simulate the writing exercise. I get the impression that the proponents of the new education system rarely discuss those matters. Do they want to show their disdain for the technical debate, or do they simply not have time for it? Do children learn to use a slate pencil naturally, just as they learn to use a spoon? Do those small hand muscles need to be trained, or will they develop naturally, once children discover the value of writing? Wasn't it Grandmother who told us something about how Dutch colonialists once saw children in Malabar learning to draw and write in the sand with sticks? She'd heard that from her grandfather.

Meanwhile, Edward is incredibly enthusiastic about his publishing house, which he calls 'Nouvelle Bibliothèque Pédagogique — Nieuwe Opvoedingsboekerij' (New Educational Library). He primarily publishes his own short works and brochures, but also translations or adaptations of works by his new Dutch friends or of some texts sent to him by Adolphe Ferrière from Geneva. I now understand that Adolphe sent Edward fragments of text, which he compiled himself two years later in Projet d'École Nouvelle.

Louis interrupts his reading again. He also had a conversation with his mother about Ferrière this summer.

"Do you think we will get much news from Switzerland after the war?" was his question

"I don't know exactly what happened in the Netherlands during the war. Rumours are circulating that Jan Ligthart died. I hope we hear from Edward soon. What I know about him is that he's near Sluis, but I haven't received any letters from him in two years either. And Switzerland remained neutral in the war, we

know that for sure now from the French refugees passing through here. So people like Ferrière may have been able to continue working on the *New School Project*."

Louis looks at his mother and wipes her sweaty head. He sighs anxiously. He's afraid that much of what they planned to do in the summer will be postponed. If only Mother would get better first, he thinks. Then he reads on.

It's now quite clear that our friend from Oostende links the cultural advantage of the Dutch to the teetotal movement and the vegetarian federation. He writes about Lebensreform, showing how deeply he embraces Reformed pedagogy. But when I asked if he had joined the Lebensreform society, I received no answer. He can be discreet, if he wants to, our friend Peeters. For example, I was very surprised when I received a message at the end of March that Edward had been appointed Officier de l'Academie Française by the French Minister of Education and Fine Arts, Gaston Doumergue.

Meanwhile, when I congratulated him in a letter on his appointment, I tried to get Edward's opinion about the Flinken of Ghent. He simply told me they wouldn't last long. And he was right. Nevertheless, I enjoyed hearing about the adventures of the Flinken and the Dangotte-family through Mum Annie. The group spent a lot of time in the nature reserves around Drongen, and Céline Dangotte started an open-air school in Assels, as soon as the Flinken understood how the poverty in the region also affected intellectual poverty. I had even made plans to visit the school in Assels. According to Mum Annie and Dad Frederick, Céline drew inspiration from Paul Robin, Ovide Decroly, and Friedrich Fröbel! Applying Fröbel's method in preschool and primary

school ensures rapid socialisation of the children through reading, writing, and guided observation of nature. Céline even said she had strived for the "enseignement global de la lecture", as Decroly puts it. There were class groups, but based on the children's abilities, not their on their age. So not as liberal as Grandma Johanna's barn after all. I think Grandma was way ahead of her time, not to mention her great-grandparents! But I hadn't reckoned with the venom of the local conservative priest. I was about to leave for Ghent when I heard that the man labeled the school an open-air dance hall run by whores. The arrogance of playing to the ignorant! You can spread quite a few false rumours in this country in the name of God. So, no more school, but I did receive a copy of the Asselch Blad. The Flinken took Raymond Limbosch's advice, who, according to Mama Annie, supposedly said: "If the children can't come to you anymore, go to them. Publish a newspaper." I have the impression that the publication of this magazine in the hands of the Flinken inspired Edward to start his own magazine, Minerva. But the Flinken and Celine Dangotte write (did they continue writing? I don't know if they're managing to get the ink and paper to publish the magazine in these wartime times—I haven't heard anything since the beginning of the war, neither from Celine nor from Edward, as I said) primarily for parents, especially mothers, and also for children. In one issue, I read: 'your love will create love in the heart of the child, love for you, love for their sisters and brothers, love for people, for all that lives, for all that feels…'. *Furthermore, I thought it was somewhat naive to think that the newspaper could help parents to comply with the rules of the* Lebensreform *to support the work of teachers in church-*

controlled schools. I noted the following passage: 'How often do we see the work of teachers being destroyed by the ignorance of parents? The Asselch Blad aims to develop parents in this area of education and can therefore be a true aid to education. Therefore, we specifically address all those charged with education.' *I've unfortunately seen dogmatic teachers destroy the work of their colleagues too often. Of course, you have to start somewhere. Edward writes more for colleagues and intellectuals interested in pedagogy, but doesn't he primarily reach his friends and acquaintances, who already largely share his own views on education? Perhaps those congratulatory words from the then-Prince, now King Albert I, are of some use…*

That launch of the Minerva magazine! How enthusiastically Edward wrote to me about his grand plans. And yes, in early October 1909, I received an issue of the international pedagogical journal Minerva, Revue d'éducation internationale et polyglot. *Naturally, I subscribed immediately. Edward wanted this journal to become the first international journal of educational reform. No big surprises in the editorial board: the Frenchman Ernest Contou, the Swiss Adolphe Ferrière, the Hungarian Ferenc Kemény, and the Belgian Paul van Oye, with Edward as director. According to Edward, it was Ernest Contou, director of the École Nouvelle de l'Aquitaine, who had urged the journal to be launched. And of course, I couldn't help smiling when I read on the title page:* Minerva is intelligent and studious, and already HRH Prince Albert of Belgium, who is so interested in educational matters, has deigned to send us his best wishes for Minerva's prosperity'.

Louis pauses his reading again and tries to remember what his mother had said about the other editors: "You've often heard me about Adolphe Ferrière, of course. He lives and works in Switzerland and is very fond of Edward's *active class*. You know, it was during my trip where I met your father that I also met Adolphe in Oostende at Edward's and we talked about his visit to the Demolins school, after I had visited Abbotsholme. Ferenc Kemény is a Hungarian who lived in Paris for a long time. He is a member of the Olympic Games committee, at least, as far as I know, that was still the case in 1912. Edward will certainly appreciate him for his vision of sports in the context of the *Pure Life*-movement, and he is also a convinced pacifist."
"And who is Paul van Oye?"
"I think Edward might have had Paul in his class, or at least known him as a student in Oostende. But I never asked him. But Paul is part of that group of students *'t Zal wel gaan,* who together with *de Flinken* tried to set up the open-air school. He must have been attracted to Edward because of his *Pure Life*-attitude. Just before the war broke out, there were some conversations about him leaving for the Dutch East Indies as a doctor of zoology. Perhaps we'll hear from him later…"

Jeanne has a coughing fit that breaks Louis' mind. He calls his younger sister and asks if she can manage to keep an eye on the doctor when he arrives so he can pass by. He fears it will be difficult, because the nursing staff is busy not only with those, like their mother, struggling with a high fever, but also with the many wounded. But perhaps he can pop in during his daily rounds in the yard.

Louis dives back into his mother's notebook.

*What immediately caught my attention was how Edward tries to involve everyone, even those who hold different views than his own. He claims to be thinking of parents in this regard as well. He also wants to provide as much international information as possible. He believes it's important that we are well-informed about what's happening elsewhere in the world. He also wants to encourage self-education and personal development, but emphasises the importance of avoiding elitist positions. And he's willing to allow dissonant voices to be heard, using the slogan '*Only tolerance can bring forth light'.

Of course, I'm interested in how the rich countries of the past use their wealth from the colonies. And just like in Belgium until recently, it's hard to say that the royal family of the Iberian Peninsula did much for the school system. In Spain, it's clearly in the hands of the church, we know that for sure now, since the rulers shot Francisco Ferrer under false pretences. But in Portugal, things aren't much better. We'd already heard about António de Vasconcelos, and Edward had also told us the history of reading methods. But it's not just about a method. There's no interest there on the part of the public government in educating people. Period. The Portuguese university says that 80% of the Portuguese population has not received any form of education. This is reported by the Mobile Schools Association *to Minerva. That's why the teachers of those traveling schools try to teach children to read quickly.The* National Education League *apparently is another association that advocates for the working class. I haven't been able to determine whether, like Ferrer, they adhere to an anarchist line or advocate for*

mutual benefit organisations like Voz do Operário in Lisboa. The league focuses primarily on public lectures and traveling libraries, which is also one of the activities of the Lisbon tobacco workers' association. Minerva also mentions the Escola Livre, a free school co-funded by workers. This school has co-education on its agenda, which, to my knowledge, isn't the case with other mutual benefit organisations. According to Edward, it's a general movement that will grow rapidly. The Escola Livre aims to educate the sons of workers and provide them with food, housing, and clothing. Another boarding school for the chosen few, after all? Something else to ask Edward about.

I once advised Mum to buy two books included in Minerva's bibliographical review: Self-reliance of students in school *by Mouton and a book titled* Priest Daens, his Life, his Struggles, his Death and Glorification*, by his brother Pieter.*

I also had to restrain myself from immediately taking out additional subscriptions to Cuba Pedagogica, Documenten des Fortschritts, l'Education, Escuela Moderna and *La Infância Anormal.*

Through Minerva, I learned that Edward realised another dream during 1910. He founded the Bureau International de Documentation Éducative (B.I.D.E.) in Oostende. Of course, I'm no longer aware of what happened after the catastrophe of 1914, initiated by emperors, kings, generals, and high-ranked officers. In one of the last letters I received from Edward, he says he now has the basic structure to spread the reformed pedagogical philosophy worldwide. He also stated that he now wants to continue to dedicate himself to the development of a truly Flemish pedagogy, which, I think, for him, should probably include the ideas of the active class *and*

of the Pure Life-*movement*.

Louis remembers laughing when he first read that remark. Now he smiles. His mother is a staunch Fröbel supporter herself, but she was certainly influenced by other things as well. When he asked her what she thought of Flemish pedagogy, she replied that Edward is generally quite open-minded about how others want to interpret the teaching profession, which doesn't change the fact that he knows exactly what he wants to do.

"That must be quite difficult if you work in a public school," Louis added.

"Yes," Jeanne replied. Felix Ortt had mentioned his friend in the magazine *North and South* a few years ago. If I'm not mistaken, it was shortly after the founding of the B.I.D.E. he wrote his friend could only be saddened by the regulations, curricula, and overcrowded classrooms imposed from above, because this prevented him from carrying out his practical work as a teacher. But that's not just the case for someone like Edward, of course. Work should be done on some kind of general guideline that competent teachers can implement as they see fit in their classrooms, but that requires an openness from the governing elites that certainly didn't exist before the war broke out, and even less so now.

I myself have always read John Dewey with great interest, ever since his attention was brought to me during my visit to Great Britain. I think it's important to listen to Dewey. He says, among other things, that he is alarmed by the "child-centred" excesses of educational pedagogues who claim to be his followers. He argues that when the adult is too dependent

*on the child, this can even be detrimental to the learning process. Perhaps he is thinking of a misinterpretation or exaggeration of what I read from him in 1902. He wrote then that it is a potential error to think that the child, not the subject, determines both the quality and the quantity of learning. The role of the teacher must never be dismissed. I believe it is in the same text that Dewey notes that "*The child and the curriculum are simply two boundaries that enclose a single process. Just as two points define a straight line, so too does the child's current point of view and the facts and truths in study define education.'. *I think most* Pure Life *people ultimately find this to be a guideline. You can hardly expect children to spontaneously adopt a lifestyle that isn't without tension and even some stress.*

But what I read by Ovide Decroly in one of the Minerva issues struck me as even more interesting. He doesn't talk so much about children, studies, and the truths of education, but about the child as an individual and the child in its environment, which is more than just a child and studies. I'll copy here what I found so interesting in a letter Edward included in Minerva: I think it would be helpful to say a few words about the small school for normals, to justify certain provisions that seem to conflict with the fundamental principles of the Land-Erziehungsheime (rural schoolhouses). We are certainly not in the countryside and only have a garden and a courtyard – however, the number of students is smaller and the children are only day students. This is also an advantage because it allows them to stay in contact with parents, and there is a need to encourage parents to explore new teaching methods as much as the educators themselves. This is more difficult when the child is not with the family. On the other hand, we

can start with younger children, precisely because it is difficult to distinguish between children under 10 and 12 years old, except for very specific reasons.

Here in the big city we have lots of resources such as museums, botanical gardens, exhibitions, cinemas, etc., etc., which are an important addition to stimulating children's interest.

Regarding the program and methods, it would take a long time to explain the guiding principles to you. We primarily consider two elements, one related to the individual—namely, interest—and the other related to the needs of environmental adaptation—namely, the usefulness of objects, beings, and facts for human life. Essentially, we propose nothing that hasn't already been proclaimed by the great educators: the application is perhaps somewhat better aligned with the teachings of genetic psychology…

Nevertheless, I imagine that only a visit and personal observation can give an idea of a method to those who wish to rely solely on their own observations. So I am convinced that one day you will do me the honour of coming to see me, and that I will have the pleasure of giving you an idea of what I am trying to achieve.

After reading these words by Ovide Decroly in Minerva, I also thought of what Molly told me about the Austrian neurologist Sigmund Freud. He supposedly, just like Pierre Janet and Jean-Martin Charcot, connected psychology and neurology, if I understood Molly's explanation correctly. Psychology and pedagogy also seem more closely related than I previously thought. But I'm also thinking here of the therapeutic value apparently associated with dialogue and projecting oneself onto someone else. Perhaps this is also the case for those who

project themselves onto their teacher as children.

I enjoyed reading Paul van Oye's article about the royal foundation Ibis, which John Bauwens founded and for which he received the support of then-Prince Albert. Of course, it's now clear to me why Prince Albert is mentioned on the title page of Minerva. Edward didn't miss the opportunity. Whether he could influence his own inspectors is still very much the question. Regarding the Ibis foundation itself, Paul van Oye writes in French that it's a specialised school for orphaned fishermen. People naturally assume that fishermen's children should automatically become fishermen, even if they are orphans whose father died at sea. However valuable the IBIS school is, it would demonstrate a greater social vision if there were other courses outside of the fishing industry. Perhaps there are, I don't know, but Paul van Oye only mentions the training for the fishing profession on a private training ship and on ships that also go out to sea. The final sentence is that in this way, these poor children receive an education and are trained to become brave fishermen. The institution is said to enjoy such admiration that people from various countries have already come to study its design.

Look, and then I'm worried. What I call the Pestalozzi syndrome regularly resurfaces: turning poor children into happy poor people. And what's more, in this case, they're forced into a social straitjacket they can hardly escape. But about the school, I only found that passage by Paul van Oye. Perhaps the IBIS work also has other training programs. But still…

And then, of course, there's the Iberian Peninsula chapter. Still no news from Spain, after the assassination of Francisco Ferrer. The conservatives apparently have a firm grip on the

school system. No, the Spanish-language magazines mainly originate from Spanish-speaking South America. But in Portugal, apparently a kind of reversal took place in October of this year. The King was deposed, and liberals and Freemasons seized power. The priority of the new rulers is seems to be to eliminate the conservative church from education. Just a few weeks after the establishment of the Republic, the provisional government decreed the end of lessons in Christian doctrine in all primary schools and junior teacher training colleges. The decree, I was told, is intended to 'to satisfy the liberal spirit and the aspirations of the republican sentiments of the Portuguese nation, considering that the teaching of dogmas is incompatible with the pedagogical idea that should guide teaching and instruction in primary schools'. *According to this decree, moral education doesn't require books; the example of the teacher's calmness, kindness, tenacity, and method suffice to explain civic and moral values. That seems to me to be a fantasy of those belonging to the new elite. I can't believe that so many illiterate people, after so many years in an environment controlled by the Catholic Church, suddenly radiate a liberal spirit with republican aspirations as the Portuguese Nation. And not all teachers suddenly radiate kindness and calmness. But the magazine* Federação Escolar (School Federation) *states that ending the teaching of Catholic religious morality in schools cannot offend anyone's conscience, since parents have the right to teach it in church and in the family. The Republicans therefore want a secular state based on the French model, preferably starting yesterday. I can imagine an article written by a certain Manuel José António infuriating the Portuguese church*

authorities. The author writes, among other things: 'The glorious foundation of the Portuguese Republic brought with it the expulsion from the national territory of this internal and external Black Legion, which for centuries had organised itself under the sarcastic, reckless signature of the Society of Jesus'.

There is also controversy about the Cartilhas. Not about its use per se, but about the model to be used. According to School Federation *the Cartilha by João de Deus promoted by the Mobile Schools Association is no longer the correct one. It should now become Manuel Antunes Amor's Cartilha Moderna. In his open letter of November 5, the director of* School Federation *the designer of the Cartilha Moderna, prizes Manuel Antunes Amo. He says, among other things:* 'Down with the old school. Long live the new school! My illustrious colleague has now realised the work I've dreamed of since leaving the teacher training college. Perhaps he unknowingly used the Castilho concept to represent the alphabet, the Portuguese Froeber that has been forgotten'. *Of course, it's nice to have a Portuguese Froeber alongside the German Fröbel, but what strikes me is a certain political-philosophical euphoria about the dawning new era, and the fact that education itself ultimately doesn't do much. And the editors of Minerva subtly noted this in 1910: 'Certainly, Portugal is plagued by many evils; but the worst is certainly illiteracy. Many individuals, and also some companies, are trying to remedy this evil; but it is the government that should put itself at the head of the movement and ensure that a Portuguese, who cannot read or write, is considered an exception. Today it is the opposite!'*

Just before the war began, Edward wrote to me that not

much has changed. Replacing one cartilha with another might perhaps shift the teaching method for reading more towards a global word method, but essentially, the relationship between the teacher and the children remains unchanged. He mentions an article by a certain F. M. Freire who complains about the time wasted preparing for the state exam at the end of primary school. The reasoning, again, is that a child who will not continue studying should not be crammed with material they will never need. So, the issue isn't so much the sense or nonsense of having children take tests on what they have learned, but rather the need to prepare for those tests, which is pointless work for the teacher if the child doesn't continue studying. Edward writes to me that the man wonders why a teacher has to put in an enormous amount of work and do his best to quickly get the exam material into the student's head, only for them to forget it again. The criticism of the school is certainly not intended to make it a more educational school. Yet, even if the teacher wanted to apply the more modern recommended pedagogy, this is simply not possible due to the amount of preparation required for the exam. And finally, Edward mentions a truly confusing remark by the same F. Freire: a teacher is judged by the number of children they register for the exam, not by their pedagogical qualities. Yet, I had a certain hope that an interesting evolution would take place in Portugal, as I will explain further.

I wrote to Edward about this shortly after the founding of the B.I.D.E., and he replied that everything depends on how the system works. Without addressing the situation in Portugal, he wrote that he had often said that the ideal education should prepare students for everyday life and make them well-

rounded individuals. And here in our country, it's clear that education sometimes literally throws sand in students' eyes, he wrote ironically. I suspect that, as a devout Christian, he struggles with the dogmatic nature of even our official education system, resulting from the church's control over schools. He doesn't want to speak too openly about what happens in other countries without sufficient information. However, he opposes not only overly strict rules but also large class sizes. And that is a consequence of the limited financial resources that many governments in many countries allocate to general primary education.

Edward may be right. I read a post in Minerva about the Belgian Revue Belge des Sourds-Muets *(*Review of the Deaf and Mutes*), published in Sint-Agatha-Berchem. The editors praise its content and refer to issues 1-2, which featured a remarkable study on Helen Keller, the young American afflicted with deafness and blindness who managed to complete a university degree. Ultimately, it all comes down to communication, to learning through dialogue, and that communication can apparently occur in many different ways.*

I then said I'd like to know more about how someone like Helen Keller conceptualises as she doesn't have the sounds of words, but only a tactile representation of them. Edward sent me some texts by and about Helen just before that damned war broke out. She was 24 when she received her Bachelor of Arts from Radcliffe University in 1904. She developed her literary talents and began a correspondence with the Australian philosopher Wilhelm Jerusalem. She recounted an episode from her learning process, when Ann Sullivan taught her to arrange symmetrical groups of strings of varying lengths: 'I was often wrong, and when Miss Sullivan

pointed out an obviously incorrect pattern, I focused on correcting it. I thought about how to rearrange the cords. Then Miss Sullivan touched my forehead and spelled "THINK" with conviction. Suddenly, I understood that the word was the name for the process I was engaged in. This was the first time I had consciously visualised an abstract idea."

Helen further discusses the difficulties of having a conversation as a child when you are both deaf and blind. She is now aware that Ann Sullivan always spoke to her as she would any other child, simply spelling everything out in her hand. Yet, at first, it was difficult for her to have a conversation. She explains that while a hearing and sighted child learns through observation and repetition, a deaf child learns not through the intonations altered by the mouth, but through the description of them, just as a blind child must be given the description of facial expressions. She then explains how difficult it is for a blind and deaf child to learn and use the subtleties of conversation, because they cannot hear either the tone of voice or see the corresponding facial expression. This process takes many years. Helen Keller gives the example of how she long associated the word 'love' with the warmth of the sun's rays, after she, while observing flowers on a hot summer day, fended off a kiss from Ann Sullivan, who then spelled 'Ann loves Helen' in her hand.

She sometimes reiterates that she learned from life itself, that Ann constantly made her feel and experience things, and always spelled the associated words in her hand. She recounts her joy when she began studying at the Perkins Institution for the Blind, where for the first time she could speak directly with other children who, like her, had mastered handwriting.

Suddenly, she no longer needed a translator, as she had until then.
I don't know much else about Helen Keller…

Louis pauses again. He makes a note in the margin next to his mother's description of Helen Keller: "Now that the war is over, find out what happened to Helen." Then he continues reading.

In many European countries, as I read in the magazines I subscribed to until the war, there was an increasing push towards compulsory school attendance or education from the turn of the century. In Belgium, there was a proposal by the Minister of Sciences and the Arts to introduce compulsory learn obligations until the age of 14, with a fourth grade for children aged 12 to 14. But he initially failed. Then, in 1913, it finally succeeded: Prosper Poullet succeeded in passing the law for compulsory education for eight years, starting with the summer holidays when a child turns six. I think this had more to do with the need for literate workers. But it does, of course, address the still-ubiquitous problem of child labour. Whether that will actually succeed, we don't yet know. The German occupation made everything impossible…
From 1910 onwards I often read about what happened in Portugal after the kingdom became a republic. There is the newspaper The School Federation *I mentioned already, which I sometimes try to read. But I don't have any issue of anymore either since the war forced us to flee to Tienen. Well, I remember, I think it was in early January 1911, it was already clear the leaders of the young republic were having a hard time with the conservative church leadership. Yet the newspaper maintains a conciliatory tone: God was not expelled from school; the school simply ceased to be sectarian*

and became a Pantheon, in which a higher, sublimer concept of God will be imparted (...) so general that it fits into all systems and adapts to all views (...). It is the duty of the teacher, Catholic or otherwise, with respect for the beliefs of his students, to combat the abuses perpetrated in the shadow of religion, whatever these may be, and to eradicate the prejudices, fanaticism, and superstitions that distort or transform faith into a sect viciously exploited by entities who place a sense of contemptible greed and absolute, unacceptable, and unprogressive dominance above its ideal purity. Apparently, there, just like in Spain and here, they have arrogant and power-hungry bishops and cardinals!

What I found interesting was João de Barros' remark that primary or elementary education is not, as many people think, the first education, without which all other education is impossible. According to him, it's fundamental education, that which makes all people citizens and through which men are given the opportunity to participate in the political life of the city and the country. It's not preparation for the next level of education, even if it does make completing it easier. But today, no one should be deprived of the three levels of primary education. Of course, the Comenius idea continues to be dismissed. His idea of primary and secondary education for everyone, followed by vocational training, continues to evoke fear in those with power and wealth. Furthermore, I know I've read that the Portuguese Republic advocates the segregation of blind and deaf children. Special schools are needed for children with mental or educational disabilities. There is also a call for education that balances physical and mental development. This education should, above all, be useful and intuitive. Books are best avoided in exchange for

excursions, visits, and educational walks, during which as much as possible is collected. This way, one can study natural phenomena in secular education. Furthermore, private schools are permitted under certain circumstances. But teachers are not allowed to teach doctrines that violate state laws and undermine citizen's freedom and social morality. That's a good thing, of course; it seems that the New School Movement, Decroly, and Ferrer are no strangers. But can such a policy be implemented? I doubt it… Edward is, of course, convinced that Ligthart, whom he admires so much, will also be followed there. He recently showed me that the school that Ligthart started in The Hague in 1885, like the initiatives of Tolstoy and Robin, was an absolute pioneer in the context of New School Movement *Montessori did not start her Casa dei Bambini until 1907, Decroly also started in that period, and Claparède followed in 1912. Ferrer went in a slightly different direction, but also not until the beginning of this century.*

The Netherlands now has clear rules that determine the number of teachers in a school based on the number of children. This puts an end to the madness of the Lancaster schools. All told, you never have more than 45 children in a class with one teacher, and this has been the law since 1912.

*Surprising statements emerged from the Portuguese Republic during that period, such as one from Henrique Sant'Ana. He observed that almost every city district had two private schools to keep girls and boys separate. He then questioned why so carefully separate the girls from the boys at that school, when a few years later they would be working together in the studio, office, or at the counter. This immediately drew fierce criticism from church priests, who quoted, among others, a French archbishop: '*We see in

various places how, without regard for their own school laws and especially for the common decency that children should be surrounded by, schools are being transformed into mixed schools. Imagine what this dangerous approach of shamelessly sitting next to each other, often face to face, on the same desks, can do to budding imaginations.' *I wonder if that imagination isn't primarily present in the minds of those who write about this.*

When I corresponded with Edward about this, he sent me a study by the Scandinavian Rasmussen on coeducation. From questions posed to children in a mixed school, three-quarters of them seem to approve coeducation. The boys say that the presence of the girls gives them better and gentler manners, while the girls believe they gain more freedom by sitting together with the boys. The teachers, on the other hand, say that it's easier to maintain order in the classroom because boys and girls complement each other, and that, in general, the mental life in the classroom is healthier.

Edward also wrote to me during that period about his proposals regarding Belgian education. He referred to the Education Nouvelle Movement. He also wrote that at the B.I.D.E. congress in The Hague, he had stated that he didn't want to completely change Belgian education, but that he simply wanted to show interested parties and teachers how they could incorporate the principles of that school movement into their own practices. He did, however, boast that the B.I.D.E. counts important individuals and organisations among its members, such as the Belgian King Albert I, the socialist senator, feminist, pacifist, and Freemason Henri La Fontaine, and foreign ministries of education from countries including Romania, Bulgaria, Tunisia, and Haiti.

It's painful to see how even sensible people in the Church continue to oppose anything secular. That same year, Cardinal Mercier wrote in his Pastoral Letter that atheistic education must be rejected, as must the printing press, which promotes such atheism. He naturally railed against the Freemasons, who, in his view, hold the nation under their yoke. No personal free choice of religion or non-religion, but rather the imposition of dogma by those who hold the most power.
The war suspended and halted much. However, just before the war broke out, the Catholic government managed to pass a four-grade general reform of primary education: more and free education for the poorer population. This essentially means that Catholic education will be subsidised by the state, with the small concession of accepting a state inspection. Socialists and liberals are furious because this will drive more children to Catholic schools. The church is demonstrating its dogmatic power. But it remains compulsory schooling, not compulsory school. The wealthy middle class and the aristocracy can rest assured; homeschooling will remain possible for those who so desire. We'll see how this plays out after the war ends.

Louis interrupts his reading for the umpteenth time when he hears his mother stirring in her feverish sleep. She's delirious and talking about Lodewijk. She briefly wakes up and addresses her son as if he were her husband. Louis has tears in his eyes. The war may be over, but it's still very doubtful whether Jeanne will overcome her illness. Today the doctor offered little hope. Reading the first sentence of Jeanne's following note sLouis lets his tears flow freely. He has to dry his eyes several times before the letters stop dancing.

The war destroyed our lives. No one can understand the intensity of the hammer blow that shattered my innermost being when I learned how utterly insane Prussian officers had my father and Lodewijk shot on October 26, 1914. Yes, they had them shot dead. They were even too cowardly to carry out their vile act of revenge themselves. What a difference between those pompous, arrogant, uniform-wearers and the German friends and colleagues, from whom I learned so much.

Lodewijk is no more, and nothing made me want to return to that cursed place where he was slaughtered. I wanted to go to Oostende with the children, but I was advised against it. Oostende full of fleeing people, was soon occupied by the Emperor's army. Many Ostend residents themselves tried to escape the country quickly, heading for the United Kingdom or the Netherlands, whose neutrality the Kaiser maintained. Edward also fled to Sluis. And how optimistic he was in that last issue of Minerva magazine I read. He wrote then: 'Cheer up, and the future is ours, to this educational internationalism which is only one form, and not less important, of the great universal brotherhood!' *He was then, like his intellectual colleagues, convinced that international cooperation would prevent the arrogant capitalists and the propertied aristocracy from starting a war for the sake of territorial expansion in Europe and the colonised world.*

I left for Tienen with the four children. Poor son Louis, who has to help me so much. I remember the ordeal from Liège to Tienen. You were 10 years old then, my son, and you had to help care for your 8-year-old brother and your sisters, aged 4 and 2. The war forced you to grow up too early, even

now, poor boy. You're fifteen and you talk and think like a twenty-year-old. You had little time to be a child. It was a bitter blessing to find shelter here on the farm without me being too affected by the whole wartime ordeal. I did lose my entire library, including all of Edward's Causeries Pédagogiques. *In fact, I lost everything: my beloved, my notes, my life. Only memories remain in mind. I even remember the titles of the entire first series of Edward's Causeries, which Lodewijk and I always went through together whenever we received a new volume. It is his choice of what an educationalist should have read, I think: Emile ou de l'Éducation, by J.J. Rousseau; Sophie ou la Femme, by J.J. Rousseau; De l'Éducation, by Herbert Spencer; Psychology de L'Éducation, by Gustave le Bon; De l'Éducation des Filles, by Fénelon; Education et Positivisme, by R. Thamin; Psychologie appliquée à l'Éducation, by H. Marion; Psychology de l'Enfant, by Dr Ed. Claparède; Comment Gertrude instruit, from Pestalozzi; Lettre à ma petite Sœur, by Félix Ortt.*

From this two series, I include Le Traité des Études by Rollin; La Grande Didactique by Coménius; L'Œuvre de Coménius by R. Menendez; La Réforme de L'Enseignement by Van Overberg; Pages de Psychologie by Jan Ligthart; L'Ecole de l'Avenir, by Kleefstra; L'Enseignement régulier de la Langue by P. Girard; Le Traité de Pédagogie by Kant; Punition et Pardon by Mme van Kol en *Les Caractères et l'Education moral by F. Queyrat.*

How enthusiastic Edward still was, on the eve of the war, about what was happening in the young Portuguese Republic. He wrote to me about what he had read of the Society for Pedagogical Studies. *He was talking about*

Braga Paixão, who recounts his experiences on his weekly walk through Lisbon with the second-grade children. Every Thursday, he was taking 12 to 18 boys into the city, where they would see how glass is made, how the baker bakes bread… They would visit brickworks, tile factories, printing houses, canning factories, and even a lime kiln.

At the same time, I also heard critical voices from Portugal regarding some New Education pedagogues. A certain Elmino Moreira writes that the Montessori method is not at all liberating, as some claim. He mentions several anarchist schools in the Netherlands that bring the concept of freedom more in line with the spirit of our times. I think he's an anarchist who wants to discuss Maria Montessori's position on the dichotomy of freedom and discipline. I don't know which schools in the Netherlands he's referring to.

I also read Silva Correia, who refuses to view school as a place where quiet, attentive, and overly polite children are raised to become some kind of disciplined slaves or veterans. He writes that the teacher must sometimes tolerate a certain tyranny from his students and that education should cultivate actors, not passive listeners. The teacher must make the student act.

Yet, nationalism is rearing its head. It's being pointed out that caution is needed when allowing foreigners to educate Portuguese children. These foreigners might misunderstand the psychology and the Portuguese soul of the local population and their children.

I wrote to Edward about it, also making a comment on what Freire said about exam pressure. In the last letter Edward sent me before we were overrun by the Emperor's army, he gives his opinion on how, in our country too,

*primary education is based too much on national heroes and instruction. This doesn't allow children to think for themselves properly. According to Peeters, this only achieves that the children possess declarative knowledge. He quotes Montaigne: '*knowing by heart is not knowing*'. He agreed with what I had heard about the Portuguese views I had read, that teaching should be illustrative and that students should learn through practical action.*

Louis is now reviewing the last notes written by his mother. They were written in the months after the end of the war and just before she fell ill. Information about what had happened outside the occupied territories since 1915 quickly seeped through. He becomes angry again when he reads the optimism with which Jeanne portrays the post-war future. She is now so weak that he genuinely fears for her life.

Since November, it's as if the educational light has returned, even though we're in the darkest months of the year. The first reports I received were that Edward spent most of the war in Oostburg, where he started a school for Flemish refugee children, commissioned by the Belgian government. He considered it an educational laboratory, including for himself. He organised his class of thirty to forty students aged 6 to 16, with assignments that the students could complete independently as a key aspect of the work. This also allowed him to work with subgroups. Although he maintains the pragmatism of John Dewey in his 1916 book School and Education*, he quickly sees the difference between theory and practice. This strengthens his bond with Ida Heijermans and with what he learned from Jan Ligthart, who died on February 16, 1916. As always my*

friend was also involved in other projects during that period. I just learned that he regularly wrote for the magazine The Woman *published by Ida, where he mainly talked about his Belgian School in Oostburg.*
I learned about Ligthart that in the last years of his life he was increasingly absorbed in Divine Love in the figure of Christ. Social improvements never truly elevate humanity, he said. That elevation only comes when humanity is renewed internally and pure Divine Love awakens within them. Now I understand the concerns made by our Red friends Thijsen and Bol for over ten years in their magazine The New School *about how Ligthart was too easily taken in by all sorts of preachers. I received a number from a returned refugee of* The New School *shortly after Ligthart's death and in it Thijsen writes openly: '*There has been a wretched mass of living and clinging misunderstanding between Ligthart and us, between Ligthart and the Dutch schoolmasters; for a long time we hoped that one day, one very good day, Ligthart would, with a bold gesture, cut through the mass of half-heartedness that surrounded him. But it never happened. We consider his entire public life, despite all the tributes heaped upon him from all sorts of foolish mouths, of little consequence to our education. Ligthart, personally, must have been a wonderful and beautiful man; everyone who knew him loved him; and all who saw him also found him brilliant as a schoolmaster.' *And yet, I think Thijsen isn't entirely right. I think Jan Ligthart really tried, but precisely because he was such a wonderful person, perhaps sometimes paid a little too much attention to proposals from others that perhaps weren't worthy of his full attention.*

I've also now learned that closer to home, in Brussels, Waxweiler has passed away. I can't help but think back to what we heard about the young António Faria de Vasconcelos who studied here in Brussels and started his school in Bièrges just before the war broke out. I'm curious to see if he'll return to Belgium and continue his New School experiment. But a word about Waxweiler. It's incredible how he managed to develop in such a short time the Solvay Institute for Sociology *into a foundation for broad-minded research. I'm not only thinking of the connections he established between Energetics and general biology and sociology, but also with ethology in non-human species. He succeeded in connecting sociology, physiology, and psychology in comparative studies. From the very beginning, the Institute used modern methodologies. This was, of course, possible thanks to Solvay's generosity, but it was the visionary Waxweiler who always kept the Institute free from any particular trend, so that it functioned as a true "laboratory" for in-depth research into urban life, worker organisation, economic development, and even the ethnography of the Belgian Congo, often using statistics. I'm curious to see how this institute will develop further after the death of its visionary director now that the insane war has ended.*

I'm also receiving new information from Portugal. I learn that Adolf Lima works as a science teacher in the anarchist project Escola Oficina No. 1. He precedes learning about birds with excursions into the fields around Lisbon, between Algés and Linda-a-Pastora, and into the dunes of Algés and Trafaria. He prefers to induce knowledge through observation rather than cramming students' memories with

words and formulas. According to him, it is the Socratic method of organising problems and questions that leads individuals to discover this or that truth.
And then, of course, I have more information about John Dewey. For me, he's become a beacon of light, someone I want to know as much as possible about. The School and Society *was already a very interesting book when it came out in 1899, but now during the war also in* Democracy and Education, *Dewey argues that schools, instead of preparing citizens for ethical participation in society, cultivate passive learners by insisting on factual knowledge and physical discipline. Instead of educating children to be reflective, autonomous, and ethical beings capable of arriving at social truths through critical and intersubjective discourse, schools prepare students for the docile compliance of authoritarian work and political structures. Schools discourage both individual and collective inquiry. Universities dominate this view of the educational institution. He stated this already in 1899 and reiterated it with even greater conviction in* School and Democracy. *Almost twenty years ago, he wrote about educational systems in general:* 'Improving education is what's needed. This isn't simply about producing teachers who are better at doing things that aren't necessary, but rather about changing perceptions of what education entails.' *This isn't to say that Dewey doesn't clearly define the qualifications of a teacher: a natural love of working with young children, a natural inclination to inquire about topics, methods, and social issues related to the profession, and a desire to share this acquired knowledge with others. He argued these are not simply mechanical skills, but should be internalised*

principles or habits that "operate automatically and unconsciously".
I think we can only grasp this if we also understand how Dewey envisions democracy. First, for him, democracy is an ethical ideal, not a merely political arrangement. Second, he sees participation, not representation, as the essence of democracy. Third, he emphasises the harmony between democracy and the scientific method: ever-expanding and self-critical research communities operate according to pragmatic principles and continually revise their beliefs in light of new evidence. This, if I understand correctly, is, according to Dewey, a model for democratic decision-making. I believe he calls for an expansion of the concept of democracy. The ethical project expands from politics to industry and to society as a whole. If we can achieve this with a more democratic school in which, as Ferrer envisioned, children from different classes come together, then perhaps we now have the opportunity, through education and culture, to help the next generation control arrogant leaders and bring them to better insights.

Jeanne would not live to see the attempts to realise that dream. But she would also not witness the new madness that resurfaced less than twenty years later. She succumbed to the virulent flu that gripped large parts of the world for two years at the end of the war and died in late spring 1919 on the large farm of Lodewijk's cousins.
To our knowledge, she never had any contact with her mother again. Louis later learned that his grandmother died not long before he lost his mother.

Adventures of a good-natured anarchist

Oostende

We go back in time to 1904 when, in Oostende, Lucien Souris is a pupil of Edward Peeters. He is just 10 years old when he and his father go to see King Leopold II unveil his father's equestrian statue in the town square, which will subsequently be known as King Leopold I Square. Soon, for the dwellers of Oostende the square is referred to as *'t peird (the horse)*.

Lucien's father is an engineer at John Bauwens's shipping company. The young boy overhears him discussing the state of affairs in the fishing industry with some of his colleagues. Just over 2,300 people work in the fishing industry, but all the shipowners complain about the shortage of manpower. Fishermen usually come from fishing families. They know the trade and its dangers from a young age. And therein lies the problem. Young fishermen prefer to switch to less dangerous and more lucrative professions. They enlist aboard mail ships or try to join the pilot corps. Some even turn away from the sea. But those who do choose the sea often lack sufficient education.

Ten-year-old Lucien isn't concerned about his education and his schooling. His father keeps a close eye on him to make sure he does well in school. He has big plans for his son. If it were up to him, he wouldn't just become a steam machine operator, but an engineer. Yes, steam machinist Souris likes to look far ahead, and both John Bauwens and Captain Arseen Blondé constantly remind him to keep Lucien in school as long as possible. The boy himself is oblivious to this. As soon as he can, he plays with

his friends in the shadow of the De Smet de Nayer bridges or at the foot of the new large church. Until recently, they also often spent time at *Comedieplein*. But that's currently a dangerous place now the *Thêatre Royal* is being demolished.

The king has sold the royal residences in the Langestraat and all outbuildings to the *Crown Domain of the Congo Free State.* Two years later the houses are sold to the *Independent State of Congo* on condition that the house occupied in times used by Leopold II's parents is preserved remaining at the sovereign's disposal. Under the treaty concerning the Belgian State's repatriation of Congo, the Belgian State also becomes the owner of these buildings.

When Lucien is fourteen years old he knows some of aspects of the entire history. He also follows the fate of the 400-room Royal Palace Hotel, the flagship of the *Queen of Seaside* Resorts. It is being sold off by its owners. Eight years were enough to determine that such a huge hotel in Oostende is madness, just like some of the other projects of King Leopold II all things considered. The company is sold off. But during the same period, professor Jules Felix confirms the qualities of the mineral water offered in the *Trinkhall* in Oostende. It is made more widely known. According to the professor, the water is beneficial for digestive problems, obesity, and kidney problems. It is called *Eau Alcaline-Sulferée-Lithinée et Boratée et Sodique.*

On the dike, near the Royal Villa and the remaining Royal Palace, another of the king's construction projects has been completed. The Venetian and Royal Galleries were built there. Recently, the old king is sometimes seen in promenade with his

mistress and their children. He has been openly living with Blanche Delacroix since Queen Marie Antoinette died, much to the chagrin of the aristocracy and nobility and the delight of many residents of Oostende.
In 1909, the family visits Oostende less frequently and at the end of the year Leopold II died. His nephew, Albert I succeeds him as king. He was known in Oostende for his commitment to the IBIS school. This concern was part of his more humanistic view of society. Then already the young prince, now king, demonstrated a certain interest in the life and well-being of the working class, mainly with the intention of pursuing a path other than the socialist one.
Ostend does lose some of its gaming rooms and associated programs. With the death of Leopold II, royal patronage of the Kursaal is withdrawn. Numerous raids follow, based on existing gambling laws. Gradually, the gambling public disappears towards other locations. But there is who is eager to attract a new clientele: users of thermal baths. Among the more dynamic hotel owners were those who wanted to give Oostende Queen of the Seaside a thermal character. They want to compete with other spas in Wallonia and France. For example, the *Maison Bouchery* displays "*Ostend Mineral Water - Park Spring*" a reference to the pavilion in the city park where the thermal water is available.

Although Lucien does not intend to follow in his father's footsteps as a fishing machinist, he is nevertheless interested in the sector. Oostende is Belgium's most important fishing port. In 1910, there are 26 steamboats, 159 large sailing ships, and 154

coastal vessels. Since Lucien's parents arrived in Oostende when he was a toddler, the number of boats with steam winches and steamboats has steadily increased. The largest of these boats can carry coal for voyages of up to five weeks.

Six companies own the steam fishing industry. The largest is still the *Pêcheries à vapeur* headed by John Bauwens. There are also the *NV 'Pêcheries d'Islande'*, the *Golder & Cie*, de *IBIS vennootschap*, *H.P. Aspeslagh & Cie* and the *NV Delta*. That's another reason why more and more future fishermen are attending school longer to have a better professional training. This year, the Ostend municipal fishing school has 49 students, and the IBIS school boats have as many as 75.

Yet the fishing industry still faces significant problems when it comes to employee well-being. Full-year contracts are rare; most hires are for six-month periods and usually occur around *All Saints' Day* and around Easter. Small fishing boats with only one or two men on board aren't even required to keep hiring records. The labour laws currently in effect in the industry don't apply to fishing. Fishermen can only rely on private funds and insurance. In Oostende, there are two of them. The *Caisse de prévoyance des pêcheurs (Fishermen's Provident Fund)* operates under the auspices of the State. All registered fishermen who are 60 years old and have worked in the fishing industry for at least 30 years receive an annual annuity of 120 francs. A widow is entitled to the same annual amount, and their children are entitled to 24 francs per capita. The insurance also covers medical expenses for work-related accidents and pays 12 francs per month during the recovery period. But all in all, the lives of the fishermen are

marked by poverty, which is evident in the skippers' parishes. Up to 18 people live per house in *Schippersstraat*, and 16 in *Sint Franciscusstraat*. In *Cirkelstraat,* more than twenty people often live per house.

The increasing fishing capacity and consumption of certain species such as sole, plaice, and haddock also has its downsides. The long-fished grounds in the North Sea are exhausted in 1913 forcing fishermen to look for new fishing grounds further afield. Steam-powered trailers now have an advantage. Ostend fishermen descend to the Portuguese and Spanish coasts, and even to West African coasts. But this is also where the difficulties begin: from the *Cape Fisterra* up to Lisbon Spanish and Portuguese laws protect territorial waters for local fishing. Once again, John Bauwens is one step ahead of the other shipowners. In 1907, he was already experimenting with refrigeration systems on board of the *O 87 Marcelle*. He embarks with the Company *Nordiana* that processes blubber oil and cod. This enabled him also to invest in finding new fishing grounds, such as off the Moroccan coast. Since 1907, trailers have also been going to the White Sea. He therefore already had alternative fishing grounds ready to go to in case of greater fish shortages in the North Sea. In 1910, he renewed with *Pioneer II* his herring fishery with an experienced crew brought in from the Westhoek region. This year he is the first shipowner to equip ships with radio equipment and to train radio operators to use radio. This is also the case for the *O 130 Jacqueline* which he is preparing to send to the Belgian Congo in the spring of next year to investigate fishing opportunities there as well. This will be done under the command

of Arseen Blondé, who now holds the diploma of *Chief Fisherman* from maritime school. After working for Cesar Degroote for a while, he has been a captain with the Bauwens shipping company for several years now. Lucien's father will sail with him as steam machinist to the Belgian Congo.

Lucien hears about this when he occasionally goes to Oostende for a weekend. He has started his civil engineering studies at the University of Ghent. He is staying with friends he met last summer in Oostende when they were on holiday there. They spent a lot of time together on the dike, at the beach, and in a few cafés where young people known for their socialist sympathies often gather. Among them, you would find members of the SEO cooperative. During his stay in Ghent, Lucien Souris has more contact with the socialist movement and can usually be found in the circles of the *Cooperative Vooruit*. He shows a great interest in the workers' enterprises within the *NV Vooruit*. Lucien imagines how, as a future engineer, he could serve in a cooperative or a worker-run enterprise. Would such a company be possible in the fishing industry? He knows it's difficult to talk about this with his father, but the few times he meets Arseen Blondé, he understands how much this captain feels connected to the fishermen he's responsible for.

Lucien is back in Oostende in the summer of 1913. Some of his Ghent comrades are with him, and in early August they visit the new Quay Station, which was inaugurated on the first of that month by King Albert I, accompanied by his sons Leopold and Karel. The young men scrutinise the *Wagon-lits* installations. The visible luxury only benefits those traveling in grand style between

London and the Continent. Reception and hospitality are provided for royals and other dignitaries. It's a stark contrast to the living conditions in the fishing quarters less than a five-minute walk from the station. But the trainee engineers are impressed by the embarkation hall, a glazed metal truss with three hing-arches.

Then comes the news that Lucien, like his friends who had also turned twenty, has to interrupt his studies and report to the military authorities. On September 15th, he is conscripted into the Belgian army. The new law on general military service is of course a major setback for him. But it is a fairer way to conscript young people for compulsory military service than the previous lottery based system. The law was signed by the current king's uncle on his deathbed. But for pacifists and internationalists compulsory service is a difficult issue. Lucien feels as if he is now definitively leaving his childhood home on Cairo Street. Tensions between the powers at the east, west, and south of Belgium had recently been running high. Nevertheless, Lucien believes the King will be able to defend the country's neutrality and that after compulsory service, he would resume his interrupted studies.

Unintended soldier

Lucien is already under the weapons when he hears that his father left with the *O 130 Jacqueline* to the mouth of the Congo River. It looks like he'll be away for quite a while. He couldn't have imagined he won't see him for the next five years. Some time after his father's departure, two of his former teachers

inform him of the tragic news that his sister has been murdered by her lover. The news takes him by surprise. He contacts his mother who tearfully tells him that she will raise baby Lucienne and that his parents want him to be her godfather.

A few weeks later, new concerns occupy enter his mind. He thinks that 1914 is well on its way to becoming *annus horribilis*. It seems the European leaders are determined to redraw the map of the colonies, at least that's what he hears from his socialist friends in Ghent when he's on military leave for a weekend in July. The friends discuss at length the assassination of Prince Ferdinand last June. Austria's subsequent declaration of war on Serbia doesn't really come as a surprise. Whether the Belgian army will be involved in armed conflict depends on the King's position. He continue to proclaim Belgium's neutrality. He claims despite his family ties to the German Imperial House and the House of Orléans, he is first and foremost King of the Belgians.

On August 2nd, Lucien receives the news that the internationalist Jean Jaurés had been shot dead in Paris two days earlier. It is still unclear to what extent this act is related to his attempts to avert war between the major alliances with France on one side and the German Empire on the other, but that same day he learned that the German Emperor had declared war on the Tsar of Russia the day before and that Germany had occupied the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg that day. Panic brakes out in the barracks. Lucien and his comrades learn that the German military leadership is demanding passage through Belgium towards France and that the Belgian King

continue to defend the country's neutrality. It then transpires that German troops had crossed the border at the same time that war had been declared on Belgium.

Lucien is assigned to the 3rd Line Regiment of the 1st Division. The division's rearguard comes into contact with the German army's vanguard on August 18th. Grimde Station becomes a defensive position, where the 3rd Line Regiment is deployed. It is Lucien's fire baptism. The German superiority is so overwhelming that his regiment not only cannot hold the position but also looses almost half of its men.

The 1st Division is then ordered to delay the German army's advance through the Dyle Valley. A small rearguard establishes roadblocks without engaging in combat. The 1st Division leadership decides that vigorous resistance is futile and advances to reconnect with the rest of the army. Lucien narrowly escapes death, and his regiment is deployed between Willebroek and the Zenne River, where he arrives exhausted on August 25th after a long day's march.

Lucien hears here that English troops have reportedly arrived in Oostende. Perhaps everything will now be nipped in the bud, he still hopes. Only later does he learn that the English presence was short-lived. He tries in vain to find out anything about his mother and little Lucienne. But it's almost impossible to obtain personal information. The King and the Belgian government did withdraw to Oostende on October 9th. It pains Lucien to have been so close to Oostende and still not to have heard anything about his family. He only knows that John Bauwens' shipping company began shifting its ships to Milford Haven last month

and is still doing so. The government and the shipowners want to prevent the fishing industry from falling into German hands if the city is occupied by the advancing army, they say. On September 5th, the *O 87 Emmanuel* receives orders to fish and unload at Milford Haven. On September 6, the *O 81 Isa* has orders to sell the catch in Swansea. On September 8, the *O 85 President Stevens* is also of to Milford Haven, followed by the *O 83 Marcelle*. On September 9, the *O 82 Gaby* and the *O 131 John* set sail to Milford Haven. The *O 97 Marie Louise* departs at the same time, ordered to first go fishing and sell in England. On September 23, the *O 87 Emmanuel* is back in Oostende to depart for Milford the next day. The crew has also its family members on board. On October 13, the government moves to De Panne because Oostende is lost. The *O 130 Jacqueline* comes in from Congo. The ship sails out of the port of Oostende the same day not only with the whole crew and its family members. In the hold of the *O 130,* Captain Arseen Blondé takes 500 refugees who want to join him. He drops off 452 of them in Folkestone, and the rest being the crew's relatives, including Lucien's mother and godchild go with him to the new mooring port for the Bouwens shipping company in Milford. Arseen wants immediately return to Oostende to pick up more refugees, but the skipper of a dredger from the Cloet-company warns that the Germans have meanwhile entered Oostende so he abandons the plan.

What remains of the Belgian army is deployed behind the Yser River. Soldier Lucien Souris, now of the second company of the second battalion of the third line regiment is currently unaware

of the flight of the *O 130* and his family. He's trying to get some rest after the march to the bend in the Yser between Schoorbakke and Tervate. At night, it's relatively quiet in the hastily dug trenches, but every sound startles anyone. He hasn't been put on guard duty today, and he doesn't know whether that's a good or bad omen. Rumour is circulating that land on the other side of the Yser has been flooded, as often happened in the polders during armed conflicts. As a child in Oostende, he'd heard plenty about the siege of the city and how the besieging troops were prevented from reaching the city as the defenders breach dikes. Here, they say sluices have been opened. But meanwhile, he hasn't been put on guard duty. He thinks of his other company comrades lying here on the damp ground. They have one thing in common. They're good marksmen. He sighs and suddenly thinks of the little portrait in the living room, where he stands as a four- or five-year-old toddler, rifle in hand, while his sister sits beside him on a wooden chair. He always loved shooting his air rifle. He knows people say he's a good shot too. But now it's not about rabbits. Is he becoming a murderer? Is he already one? His mind returns to the portrait. He never asked his parents if the print was made by Flemalle's photographer or if this was their first portrait in Oostende. Then he wipes away a tear, thinking of his murdered sister. He still hasn't fully grasped what happened, but he does curse the day his parents took in the man who later became his sister's lover.

Murderer, murderers… Do the other boys trying to lay to rest on both sides of the Yser River also have such thoughts? Or are

there some who are too numb to think much anymore. Every order is meant to be carried out. And in recent weeks, this much has become clear: it's a case of shooting or being shot. How many people are injured or killed by stray bullets, even by their own, how many by deliberately aimed bullets?

Just before dawn, he knows he's guessed correctly. His group, which had been trying to sleep is being mobilised: out of the trench, into the field, and fire at will in the direction of the enemy. Schoorbakke has to stay in our hands at any cost; they're not allowed to cross the bridge. They're shooting, loading, shooting, loading. Then he feels a stabbing pain in his left hand. Blood. He drops. A comrade calls out. He waits. A long time. With his eyes closed. Then he feels himself being lifted and carried. Escaped, once again. But it's the first time a bullet not only came close to him but actually hit him.

The fighting at the Schoorbakke bridgehead was fierce, as it was at several other potential crossing points. There was a great danger that the German army would also occupy this last stretch of land between the Yser River and the sea. The Nieuwpoort-Diksmuide railway line becomes the new border between the two armies. King Albert abandons his reservations and authorises the complete flooding of the Yser plain between the railway embankment and the left bank of the river. But Lucien does not experience personally the fighting at Ramskapelle and Pervijze. On November 14, four days after the German army occupied Diksmuide and both sides began to entrench themselves, he stays in Courseulles-sur-Mer. He had written a personal note of the events for his own information: '*I was*

wounded at Schoorbakke, during the Battle of the Yser on 24.10.1914 at dawn. Our company was occupying the trenches on the left bank of the Yser, immediately downstream from the Schoorbakke front, when the commander of Company W ordered us to leave the trenches and position ourselves as skirmishers in the fields behind the trenches facing south. It was during the execution of this order that I was wounded by a bullet in the left hand. I was evacuated to the hospital in Courseulles in Calvados.' Lucien knows he was incredibly lucky that the wound to his hand didn't become infected before he could be treated. The convalescent home where he spent several weeks, houses many young men with partially or completely amputated limbs. The story is always the same. When they could finally be treated or arrived at the field hospital, their wounds were so festering that, to prevent further gangrene, the doctors' only option was amputation.

The occupation of Belgium, whose neutrality was stipulated by international treaty, is now almost complete. The German military leadership is indignant that the strategy of attacking the French army from the rear has failed. What was supposed to be a swift war is in danger of becoming a protracted siege, as has happened so often in history.

Despite all the socialists' internationalism and cooperative ideals, military appeals with nationalistic undertones seem to carry more weight. This surprises many conductors, including the Bolshevik leader Lenin. He cannot understand why even the socialist parties supported their respective countries' war efforts. He wonders why workers and peasants are fighting the

bourgeoisie's imperialist war instead of taking up the class struggle. He himself flees from Austria to Switzerland.

On January 10, 1915, Lucien Souris is back with his company at the front. His comrades tell him how miserable they felt just before Christmas and how much more miserable they feel now. That December was cold and wet, and the trenches on both the Belgian and German sides were full of young people dreaming of home. It seemed so unreal that, separated by a few meters of land, they had to hide on both sides between sorties. As Christmas Day approached, it was as if the gunfire spontaneously ceased. Often at night, you would hear Christmas carols on both sides, and on Christmas Day itself, here and there a spontaneous polyphonic and multilingual choir would sing. Several boys witnessed faces suddenly appear on both sides and men even crawled out of their trenches to exchange a cigarette or a swig of brandy with the boys on the opposite side. Although the officers didn't prohibit this Christmas fraternisation and some even participated in it, the events were reported, and on Boxing Day orders came that such fraternisation would no longer be tolerated. Lucien isn't really surprised by what he's being told. Like him, there are probably many sane people who wonder what is the point of digging in when no one really knows how to proceed on the ground, or why. Working-class internationalism seems doomed, and this Christmas fraternisation is just a minor episode, a glimmer of hope that all is not lost when it comes to solidarity among the common people.

But the violence of war soon makes those thoughts fade. Like everywhere along the Yser Line, his company falls into an

endless routine, alternating days in the front line trenches with days in the logistical lines, followed by a few days of “rest” further away from the front.

On the days up front one is usually standing or sitting in the water or freezing cold. Often, food arrives cold and there are times when the field kitchens don’t deliver anything due to falling grenades and exploding shells. And sometimes one is given a disgusting mess as food in the mess tin. The entire area is wet and swampy, yet there’s no drinking water available. Up there, one often trip over half-buried corpses, constantly injuring oneself on barbed wire and metal debris. Digging toilets is a hopeless task.

The days in the rear trenches are mainly spent reinforcing walls and improving connecting ditches that can be bombed out just as quickly, after which the work starts all over again.

No, then a few days of rest are somewhat better. Although one will be startled by some attack here too, one can still hope for a bath, and perhaps to rid oneself of lice and fleas. Some try to find female companionship in nearby inns or pubs, but others seek the company of a dog. The animal can accompany into the trenches to hunt rats, if one can manage to convince the animal enough to join in the human madness.

During the Second Battle of Ypres, in April 1915, the German side is firing a large amount of suffocating gas towards the Belgian, French, Canadian, and British defense lines. Near Steenstrate, the 3rd Line Regiment rushes to the aid of the grenadiers. Although the gas quickly becomes notorious in the trenches, there are still those who refused to wear a mask.

When Lucien is nominated corporal on May 18, his first concern is to insist that his squad strictly follow the guidelines for using the masks. But shortly afterward, the offensive stalls and in the following months, the company he is in is deployed to various locations on the Yser Front on logistical missions.

With spring and summer, the wetness and cold have disappeared from everyday life, but now, besides fleas and lice, there are also clouds of mosquitoes. And on hot days, the stench is unbearable.

During one of the rest periods behind the front lines, Lucien hears that Queen Elisabeth had spoken in March about *an Iron Curtain* when she spoke of the separation between herself and her homeland. Naturally, as the King's wife she cannot have any contact with anyone living in what is now considered enemy territory. Yet, untrue rumours persist that she passed on information to the German occupiers. During another respite, at the end of the summer, Lucien meets a young pacifist who fled to Milford and is now a volunteer stretcher bearer. He knows nothing about the Souris family, but for the first time, Lucien hears something about the *O 130 Jacqueline*. It did indeed return from Congo and was given the warname *Raymond* and continues fishing from Milford under the command of Captain Blondé. During one of the expeditions, Captain Blondé is said to have met with the Canadian *SS Morwenna* when it was torpedoed by a German U-boat. Blondé then set a course straight for the U-boat with the intention of sinking it. The submarine would have taken *Raymond* under fire and one fisherman was killed. Although Lucien doesn't know if his father

still works as a machinist with Captain Blondé, he is immediately concerned. But he is assured that it was a member of the deck crew. When the U-boat finally submerged, about thirty people of the *Morwenna* were still drowning, retrieved from the water and taken to Milford.

On December 10, 1915, after almost a year of continuous presence at the front, Lucien is completely exhausted. He's not the only one. But when he becomes seriously ill and pneumonia is feared, he's sent on convalescent leave for a couple of weeks. He can only feel amazement at the fact that, for the second year in a row in this cursed war, he's able to spend December far from the front in a relatively quiet environment. He's certainly not superstitious, yet it's as if something is watching over him…

During his convalescent leave, Lucien had the opportunity to learn more about what is happening outside the front lines. He learns for example that the German occupiers are apparently certain of their permanent presence in Belgium. New railway lines are being built. A French socialist lent him some newspapers, and Lucien learns that a brand-new railway line is being constructed between Aachen and Tongeren, leading to the front line. The French socialist press focusses primarily on the prisoners captured during the construction of a massive viaduct over 1 km long in Moresnet. This information comes from Dutch border guards there. The same press also criticises the recruitment of soldiers among the working population. A cartoon depicts athletically built men being labeled "*meat for cannon*" while an officer says about a crippled old man: '*We don't send that one, we keep him for breeding*'.

But meat for cannon can also be meat for forced labour. The German occupiers are using deported prisoners for forced labour everywhere. For example, more than 12,000 Russian prisoners are put to work in Moresnet, many of whom die of hardship. And this is also the case in other places where slavery, which seems to have been part of warfare since time immemorial, is once again making a full-blown comeback. Russia is bound by treaties to those fighting against Germany and Austria-Hungary, which increases discontent among poor peasants and workers for whom this war only brings more suffering. Nationalistic gestures by the Tsar, such as changing the German-sounding name of the city of St. Petersburg to Petrograd, are almost childish. Moreover, his predecessor, who built *Sankt-Piter-Boerch* had the then-wealthy United Provinces built in mind and not the then-deficient Empire of the German Nation. This discontent among the working population is also reflected in sections of the European socialist movement. It seems as if this war, started for imperialist reasons, is dividing the movement into two camps: the internationalists who oppose all wars and the defenders or defensists who believe that the territory of the fatherland must be defended if attacked.

Meanwhile, Lucien learns that the German army has built a logistics railway along the coastal region between Oostende and Dudzele, where depots have been established. This means that the Yser Front can be supplied both via Zeebrugge and Oostende, and via the railway line to Diksmuide.

The German military leadership gives no indication that the trench front from the Yser to the Vosges is a stalemate.

Meanwhile, the French and British leaders are increasingly drawing conscripts and volunteers from their colonies and overseas territories.
In February, Corporal Lucien is assigned to the fourth company of the fifth battalion of the 3rd Line Regiment. He survived another attack and counterattack to capture a few meters of no man's land and was able to safely lead the group he commanded back to the relative peace of the hinterland. Not entirely unexpectedly, he is promoted to sergeant on March 1st and commissioned on *Instruction course* ind Gaillon.
Back at the front on March 10th, he takes charge of a section tasked among other things with shoring up some of the soldiers' quarters in the main line. The sentry posts in the connecting trenches between the first line and the main line also need work. These are often covered in a thick layer of water and mud, and the soldiers stationed there quickly develop swollen and infected trench feet, especially if they can't find enough dry socks in time.
Often the work has to be redone several times, given the unpredictable weather and constant skirmishes that cause newly improved corridors to collapse again.

On June 24, 1916, a decree-law is passed stipulating that soldiers who fought in the front lines, showed courage, and were not subjected to disciplinary measures would receive additional compensation to their pay in the form of front stripes. Lucien learns he received his first front stripe on August 1, 1915, and a second on February 1, 1916. While he appreciates the award, he would prefer that no one, including himself, had to

live in such conditions. He thinks with some bitterness that if he isn't shot first or died of some illness contracted in the trenches, he might collect even more decorations, as there seems to be no end in sight to the misery of the entrenched soldiers who have to periodically attack or defend themselves from attack.

In mid-July, Lucien is sent for another briefing. His briefing ends in Paris, where he receives permission to visit the city until midnight on July 15th. The following day, he is officially promoted to adjutant.

Meanwhile, the Battle of the Somme has begun, and Lucien, during his one-day leave in Paris, hears horror stories about the ongoing offensive. The French and British military leaderships refuse to admit that the planned objectives of the first phase are impossible to achieve. They cannot break through the German lines, and rumours in Paris suggest that more than 50,000 soldiers have died in one single day in the no-man's-land between the two trench systems.

Worried, Lucien returns to the Belgian Yser Front, where he is assigned to the 6th Company of the 23rd Line Regiment. Here on the Yser, there is no sign of a major offensive yet. The Belgian army leadership knows it lacks the necessary men and equipment and King Albert is very wary of attacks that almost certainly result in the death of soldiers. So, they continue to defend the occupied line albeit with almost daily skirmishes but which cost few lives compared to the massacre of the Somme. Lucien is given command of a platoon of primarily Flemish-speaking soldiers. He often first translates orders into Dutch addressing the soldiers in their native dialect. Although some

orders seem illogical in the trenches themselves, Lucien is aware that a breakthrough by the German army here would not be beneficial for what is happening on the Somme. He often tries to encourage the newcomers to the front. He's a popular figure among the simple farmers' and workers' sons who join the troops as soon as they reach the legal age. His continued presence at the front makes him earn his third front stripe on August 13th of this year. For almost two years now, he thinks, most of his ordinary days have been spent trudging around this stretch of West Flemish polders, constantly coming under fire not only during sorties ordered from above, but also during routine trench maintenance. He's surprised by the word "*Ordinary*". How can this word even enter his mind when it comes to trying to keep the deep scars in the landscape dry and free of vermin, where often frightened and weeping men are trapped in boredom, a boredom interrupted only by orders for impossible and sometimes pointless tasks that leave most of them longing for the next period of boredom. Some are so bewildered that they would rather stay dead if dying at the front weren't so terrifying in many cases.

On the eve of the third winter of the war, Lucien is transferred again, this time to the 11th Company of the 3rd Regiment, which had been split from the 23rd Line Regiment in May of that year. Some are reluctant to see him go. He himself believes that more troops might provoke the Belgians into more action at this end of the long Western Front line. But then he hears how the Allied high command halted the Somme offensive in mid-November. The capture of just some hundred square kilometers

had cost over 600,000 lives. After the war, he would learn that more than 400,000 Germans had died. A million deaths for a new stalemate. This time, Lucien spends the Christmas and New Year's period in the trenches with the troops under his command. It appears that the 3rd and 23rd Line Regiments will continue to defend the Steenstraete and Diksmuide sectors. The prospect that the platoon might be stationed in the same place for an extended period suddenly provides a kind of incentive to work harder on improving the shelters. Efforts are being made to keep rest areas drier and tidier, and more separate areas are being created where garbage and excrement can be disposed. But the presence of rats is unavoidable, so dogs are still permitted. During the often long, wet, dark, and very cold days of this year's end, it's all better to try to stay warm by digging and shoring up, or by training a dog. At times that can even be more appealing than playing homemade or softened cards at a smoky fire. And for Lucien, anything is more appealing than having to sit still and listen to crude soldier jokes full of harsh curses and obscenities, or stories about partly true and partly invented sexual exploits.

In January 1917, a new decree-law slightly amends the previous law on front stripes. On February 13, 1917, Lucien has four. With some irony, he thinks 13 had apparently become a lucky number for him; the new front stripe means he is still alive, and he wonders if that would still be the case when the fifth one arrives. Or perhaps the German army would weaken so much that the Kaiser would abandon the fight… After all, that army had to occupy itself with two fronts, and if he were to

believe the rumours here the pressure on the Western Front is increasing.

During a brief rest, however, he learns that the Eastern Front might indeed be weakening, but to the advantage of the Central Powers. It turns out that the Russian Tsar would have been forced to abdicate on March 15th. Lucien struggles to imagine the suffering of war in Russia. The winters are much colder there than on the Yser River, and he is already aware of the enormous number of Russian prisoners of war captured by the Central Powers. All of this supposedly led to a massive popular uprising a few days earlier, not only in Petrograd but also in other parts of the country. There are persistent rumours that Lenin, who had fled to Switzerland at the beginning of the war, is now in Petrograd.

Among Russian socialists, there are those who rally around Lenin and believe that only class struggle is meaningful. Therefore, they oppose the ongoing war, as it mobilises manpower for that class struggle in support of the property owners who are fighting each other. Lenin argues that there is no place for defensists in his Bolshevik movement. Leaders of the revolutionary movement with a more nationalistic stance, including Stalin, readily changed their minds so as not to be excluded when the leader presented his four-point position: all land to the peasants, all power to the soviets, all factories in the hands of the workers, and immediate peace with Germany. The German Kaiser undoubtedly took Lenin's public declarations against the war into account and saw in them the opportunity to conclude an advantageous peace with Russia and thus deploy all

his troops on the Western Front.
Only after the war would Lucien learn the details including how the German government supported Lenin and his staff's journey to Petrograd by transporting them in a sealed train through Germany, as well as neutral Sweden and Finland, once the Tsar had transferred the throne to his brother promptly refused by him. Furthermore, the Bolshevik section of the socialists, led by Lenin, attempted a failed coup d'état. When several of the movement's leaders were captured, Lenin fled back to Finland.

Still at the Yser, in the 11th Company of the 3rd Line Regiment, Lucien is promoted from non-commissioned officer to officer, with the rank of second lieutenant on July 7, 1917. Spring had once again given way to summer, alternating between wet and dry days. The temperature hovers around twenty degrees Celsius, but the sun is often hidden behind clouds. So the ground is not really drying out.
After an initial test, German troops launch 125 tons of mustard gas, which they call *Gelbkreuz* grenades, into the Noordschote Boezinge sector during the night of July 12-13. Lucien's company is not hit, but it is clear that this gas is much more dangerous than the gas previously used.
At the Red Cross Hospital in De Panne, nurse Jane de Launoy and her colleagues witness the consequences. She herself recounts that the men, clothed and lying in bed, can't breathe without convulsively clenching their fists being blue, wild, and bewildered, She notes indignantly: "*Many who don't die will remain blind. Why aren't those who want and prepare for war suffocated to death with the cruelest tortures?*" Other nurses don't dare tell the soldiers on

leave about their experiences: they see men with burned lungs, their faces ravaged, and those who still have breath to scream, scream in pain. Others can only whisper, knowing that the gas, like a constricted throat, will suffocate them.

Lucien has other concerns: in early August, so much rain fell that the trenches were as swampy as during the autumn storms. Maintenance is practically impossible. He is astonished and distraught when, exactly six months after receiving his fourth front stripe, on August 13, 1917, he receives his fifth, along with several other men from his platoon. Comments are made about how many more front stripes would be awarded until the end of the war, assuming law does not change in the meantime. Some jokingly wonder if by the end of the war the sleeves will be long enough to sew on all the stripes.

Late summer and autumn are upon us, and once again the platoons are put to work to ensure the smoothest possible logistical connections between the rear and the front lines. The 130 km of railway lines the army has built over the years to quickly supply soldiers with ammunition and food must be inspected. Among non-commissioned officers and junior officers, speculation rages about the possibility of a new major offensive. Rumours circulate Lenin has finally succeeded in his coup, and reports resurface the German Kaiser is pushing for peace negotiations with Russia, which would allow him to transfer troops stationed on the Eastern Front to the Western Front. The Belgian, French, and British military leaderships react nervously despite the United States' declaration of war on Germany.

Lucien Souris receives the news that he is promoted to lieutenant on November 7. On December 12, he is sent to the officer training course. There, he learns he will be awarded the War Cross. This bronze decoration was instituted on October 25, 1915, and is awarded to soldiers for an act of bravery against the enemy. In his case, he is eligible, as he had 5 front stripes, representing 3 years of front-line service. The ribbon bears a bronze palm with the letter *A* (Albert I). The Day Order entry is made at army level.

During his officer training as a lieutenant, Lucien Souris learns the Ostend fishing fleet's mandatory relocation to Milford Haven had led to unexpected developments. British fishermen had already been forming fishermen's unions, modeled on the metalworkers' unions. Captain Arseen Blondé must have recalled his youth and the speeches by Edward Anseele during a fishermen's uprising. A strike also broke out among the machinists of the Belgian steamboats joined by Lucien's father. Captain Arseen, who always sided with his crew, spontaneously stepped in to speak and make the machinists' demands clear to the shipowners. Not only the machinists succeed in obtaining what they had gone on strike for — primarily better working conditions — but the Ostend fishermen staying in Milford also decided to form the seamen's union *Union of Belgian Seamen* to be established assisted by the secretary of the *Seamen and Firemen Union* of Milford Haven. Lucien further understood that the shipowners were not entirely happy with this development. To defend themselves against the collective mobilisation of the fishermen, they decided to establish the *Union des Armateurs - Redersvereniging (Shipowners' Union)*.

It's almost surreal that he hears of his father for the first time embroiled in a labour dispute, while at the moment his goal is simply to survive the war.
Meanwhile, Oostende and its inhabitants suffer more from British attacks than from the German occupiers. This is actually due to the rapid withdrawal of the city's defenders at the beginning of the war. The port was not destroyed at that time. The occupying army thus gained an important and well-equipped port, good for its fleet of U-boats and destroyers. Now the port and surrounding neighbourhoods came under fire. Many houses in that part of the city are destroyed and at least 300 civilians who remained in the city are killed. Lieutenant Lucien Souris who returned to the front at the end of January 1918 has quite a few people from the region among his men. He can only tell them that parts of Oostende are certainly uninhabitable for the time being.

Lucien receives his sixth front stripe on February 13, just before frontline operations erupt again in full force as the German army apparently returned to the offensive. On March 1, 1918, it is clear that the German leadership is launching an offensive with the intention of crossing the Yser River. This is likely intended to reach Dunquerque and Calais and make these ports unusable for the British. Diksmuide is thought to be the base of operations at the time. Or was it simply a feint to keep the Belgian soldiers occupied? Various gases are now being used extensively, including the relatively benign tear gas and the deadly phosgene and chlorine.
But then the German army suddenly shifts its attacks further

south. La Bassée and Armentières are captured, after which it heads north again. On April 10, the intention is clear to straighten the bend around Ypres, but for the time being, the German troops advance no further than Messines between Wijtschate and Ploegsteert. On April 15, the Belgians still firmly hold the front north of Ypres, despite the continuous German attacks. South of the city, a veritable massacre takes place. Near Kemmel Hill, more than 5,000 soldiers lose their lives. The entire hill is destroyed; not a single tree remains standing. The German troops are unable to break through to the coast, and the progress towards Ypres is slow. Ultimately despite a large number of casualties the combined forces hold their ground, and on May 1, the German army leadership halts the spring offensive on the northwest line of the front. More than 1 million people were killed on both sides.
Dunquerque and Calais remain outside the grasp of the German army, meaning that the ports of Oostende and Zeebrugge remain strategic for the occupying forces. The British military leadership wants to try again to blockade Oostende after a completely failed attempt to block both ports. This happens on May 10th but they fail again to completely close the port. The Vindictive, loaded with concrete blocks, is sunk by German artillery, albeit outside the designated area, with eight casualties. Ultimately, the U-boats are able to continue using both ports.

Early August 1918, the French, British, American, Australian, and Canadian commands plan new offensives along the entire Western Front. The Belgian army leadership is asked to defend the western corner from this line of trenches. The line runs from

Nieuwpoort, along the Yser River in front of Diksmuide, via the Ypres-Yser Canal and the Ypres Salient up to Wijtschate. On August 13, Lucien receives his seventh front line. He begins to think that the bullet that was supposed to kill him hadn't yet been forged. What frightened him the most are the mines and the bayonets. During the long years on the front, he had too often to tell disemboweled comrades that absent stretcher-bearers were on their way, held the hands of dying soldiers, and watched others waste away from illness or incurable wounds. He also recalls what he saw and heard in the hospital at De Panne after the first major mustard gas attack, just over a year ago. He saw misery everywhere. He sometimes wonders how the urge to live keeps him plodding along, automatically putting on a gas mask at the slightest sign of fog. The horrific images in his mind make him nauseous, but most of the time he keeps those images in mind with "*I won't let that happen to me*", as if someone has the choice of whether or not to be hit by a grenade or to feel the gas seeping into a suddenly defective gas mask…

By mid-September, a large part of the Belgian army is ready to participate in the announced liberation offensive. Under pouring rain, ten of the twelve divisions are deployed on September 28, 1918, for the Battle of the Flanders Hills, supported on the right wing by the British Second Army and several French reserve detachments. Under the King's command, the offensive takes place in two phases. The main attack is to clear Houthulst Forest and the ridges of Houthulst, Stadenberg, Westroosebeke, Passchendaele, and Broodseinde from German forces.

The capture of Houthulst Wood is led by the 7th Belgian

Infantry Division, supported by four line regiments, including the one Lucien's platoon is part of: the 7th Artillery Regiment and the 7th Engineer Regiment. Despite significant losses, the Belgian soldiers gain control of the woods by the evening of the 28th. Two days later, this phase of the Liberation Offensive comes to an end. The 3rd Line Regiment in which Lucien serves had cleared the "Riegel" of Klerken of German soldiers.
But the war is not over yet. The loss of men forces regrouping, resulting in Lucien joining the 9th Company of the 3rd Line Regiment on September 29th. In the first days of October, further south, Poelkapelle, Langemark, and Rumbeke are captured, and the troops reach the outskirts of Iseghem and Lendelede. Taking advantage of this advance, and confronted with a retreating German army, the Belgian troops stationed on the flooded Diksmuide-Nieuwpoort front reach the Yser River. In mid-October, the German troops move eastward. On October 17, 1918, Belgian soldiers enter Oostende and the suburbs of Bruges.
The King and Queen come personally to take stock of the state of affairs of *'liberated Oostende'*. Parts of the harbour and the surrounding neighbourhoods are destroyed, but the railway, the Kursaal, and the racecourse survived the war well. The harbour will soon be fully operational. Apparently, the German troops, upon leaving the city, didn't also have time to employ the scorched-earth tactics employed in some other abandoned areas.

On November 11, 1918, Germany surrenders and the armistice comes into effect. Two weeks later, Lieutenant Lucien Souris is assigned to the Coastal General Staff. It is time to take stock. Incoming information indicates that some 70 million

soldiers were involved in this war, which lasted just over four years, 60 million of whom were European. Initial data indicate that more than 9 million men lost their lives on the battlefield or as a result of wounds and diseases sustained as soldiers. That's an average of just over 6,100 per day.

Lucien learns that more than 21,000 Belgian soldiers were killed on the battlefield during the war. With the wounded and sick who died later, that number roughly doubles. And yet, the Belgian king only wanted to maintain the neutrality to which Belgium was obligated in 1831… among others by then-Prussia, in addition to the other European powers of the time, namely the United Kingdom, France, Austria, and Russia. Article 9 of the *Treaty of the XVIII Articles* was after all the law imposed by those powers states and say: '*Belgium, within the borders as they will be demarcated in accordance with the principles laid down in these provisional provisions, will assume everlasting to be a neutral state. The five powers, without wishing to interfere in Belgium's domestic regime, guarantee its perpetual neutrality, as well as the integrity and inviolability of its territory within the limits laid down in this Article.*' A good example thinks our good-natured anarchist to see how treaties are full of empty promises.

Lucien isn't alone in recognising the fragility of international treaties. If his fellow townsman August Beernaert were still alive, he would be deeply shocked by the way the treaty rules of the Second International Peace Conference in The Hague were simply ignored during this war: the German invasion of neutral Luxembourg and Belgium in August 1914, bypassing France, violated the 1907 Convention, which stipulates that warring

parties may not violate neutral territory or move troops through it. Poison gas was used by all major warring parties throughout the war, in violation of Declaration IV-2 of the 1899 Conference and that of the 1907 Conference, which explicitly prohibit the use of poison or poisoned weapons.

First years after the war

On January 18, 1919, negotiations on general reparations began in Paris, and these negotiations were likely to drag on for some time. It was clear, however, that Moresnet would never gain independent status after the German occupation, but would be definitively incorporated into Belgium along with the East Cantons. As a result, the zinc company's operations in Kelmis would once again be largely within Belgian territory.

On the same day, just over two months after the armistice, the Ostend-Dover line reopened. Tourism from England is once again possible, and apparently quite a lot of English are using it. However, the ferry service is primarily important for bringing relatives of deceased soldiers to the mainland. There is still a significant lack of precise information, especially regarding the seriously wounded and the many soldiers left behind on the battlefields during the 1918 offensives, often making precise identification impossible.
Lucien is still serving with the General Staff of the Coast. He has had the opportunity to visit his childhood home on Cairo Street. It wasn't too badly affected by the bombing raids targeting the harbour. He informs his parents, who are staying in Milford

Haven, but they won't be returning to Oostende for the time being.

On March 31st, Lucien receives the news that he had been awarded the Iron Medal two days earlier. He also received an eighth front stripe. This was awarded by ministerial decree in January to all soldiers who served at the front throughout the entire war, from 1914 to 1918. It was primarily a measure to provide financial compensation to those who had to give up everything at the outbreak of war. Lucien is now 26 and doesn't know if or when he'll be able to resume his studies, which he was forced to interrupt six years ago. He does hope to return soon to civilian life as a reserve officer, now that he's made it clear he's not interested in a military career. But the dispensation isn't coming anytime soon. Nevertheless, he's optimistic and writes to his parents in Milford Haven on May 30th: "*Everything is fine here, but nothing has been decided yet regarding the departure. I haven't given up hope yet of seeing the dispensation announced. Love everyone, and big kisses to her godfather's great girl.*'

When Lucien has to appear before his commander early July, he's convinced he'll be informed that his discharge papers are ready. But that's not the case. Lucien is informed that he became a reserve officer with the rank of lieutenant on June 26th. But for the time being, he's not released from his military duties. The army needs to be reorganised in the aftermath of the war, and there's currently a dire shortage of officers. So, he's told, the nation needs reserve officers. He resigns himself to the situation and hopes that the need for reserve personnel will soon be over. What he's less pleased about is that he's assigned to the general

staff of the East Flanders military administration and therefore has to leave the coast. It will be another four years before he's released from his duties, but the transfer to Dendermonde will give his life a completely new twist. On July 19, 1919, Reserve Lieutenant Lucien Souris, wearing two stars on his collar, the War Cross and Iron Medal on his chest, and eight front stripes on his left sleeve, arrives at Dendermonde station to report to the General Staff of East Flanders.

Shortly afterward, he is allowed to pin two more medals to his coat. The Inter-Allied Victory Medal is also established in Belgium on July 15 and awards to all those who served the mobilised Belgian army between August 1, 1914, and November 11, 1918. This bronze medal is initially proposed by French Field Marshal Foch. It hangs from a rainbow ribbon, the same for all the Allies. On the obverse of the medal, the goddess of victory is depicted with outstretched wings standing on a globe, holding a laurel wreath in her left hand and a sword and a laurel wreath in her right. The reverse shows the Belgian coat of arms within a laurel wreath with the text *'la grande guerre pour la civilisation. De grote oorlog tot de beschaving (The Great War for Civilisation)*' is engraved. A week later, the Commemorative Medal for the War 1914-1918 is established and awarded to those who served in the ranks of the Belgian armed forces during the World War and meet the criteria for the Victory Medal. This bronze, somewhat triangular medal can also be adorned with a number of emblems, including a silver bar for each front stripe and a gilded bar to replace five silver bars.

A few weeks after arriving in Dendermonde, Lucien Souris

meets Charlotte Hofstadter for the first time when he and the canteen manager investigate local butchers to ensure sufficient supplies for the barracks canteen. She is one of the daughters of a butcher in a suburb with whom they have agreed to supply the army regularly. Sixteen-year-old Charlotte finds this lieutenant, who has clearly experienced many adventures, a very interesting figure. He is courteous. It takes her a few weeks to realise that his distinctly French charm is linked to his origins. She learns that, although French is always spoken at home, his father taught him from an early age to always address his subordinates in their own language. His father speaks the Ostend dialect with the fishermen. He himself adopted a Dutch less marked by dialect. She also hears from an adjutant who spent the last weeks of the war with him that he addressed his Dutch-speaking subordinates, almost all of whom came from Oostende, in their own dialect. He received harsh comments about this from French-speaking graduates who barely spoke Dutch. He always replied the same way: "*We're sending some of our men to their deaths. Can they at least receive orders for King and Country in their own language?*".

When King Albert I was given a grand reception by the American president in October of this year, the soldiers with exit clearance in Dendermonde celebrated quite exuberantly. Lucien kept an eye on things. He visited several establishments where people could drink or dance. He also popped into the butcher shop of father Hofstadter, which serves as a tavern on Sundays and where people can dance. That day, Charlotte see him in his exit uniform for the first time. His uniform jacket is adorned in

order with the War Cross, the Iron Medal, the Commemorative Medal, and the Victory Medal. Later, she learned he considered the bars on the commemorative medal unnecessary, given the stripes they refer to are sewn onto his sleeve.

On January 10, 1920, almost a year after the start of negotiations, the Treaty of Versailles comes into effect. For Moresnet, this is the definitive end of the *condominium*. Anyone who lives there becomes Belgian. Anyone who wants to retain German nationality will have to leave the country within two years.

Meanwhile, the royal couple remains very popular in many parts of the world. Although Albert himself is not so happy with his nickname *King-Soldier* he is praised almost universally for his attitude in leading his men as King of the Belgians during the war years.

Lucien now knows that some of the offensives launched or planned by the French and British military leadership were viewed very critically by the King and his General Staff. The King knew enough about life at the front and the difficulty of sorties from the trenches to limit suicidal actions.

But the longer he is in the army as *Reserve Officer in service* the more questions he has about the entire war and the subsequent peace treaty. Will that treaty ultimately fuel the discontent of the vanquished *Kaiser*? The one who ultimately decided to flout Belgium's neutrality remains now undisturbed in the Netherlands; many officers who arrogantly allowed their men to commit war crimes remain influential in post-war Germany. And don't the Allied victors too often and too humiliatingly proclaim victory,

easily forgetting that unauthorised weapons were also used on this side? That many parents, widows, and children in Germany weep for their dead? Wasn't false propaganda fed to ordinary people, so that the sudden collapse of the army, often due to extreme exhaustion, in itself sowed discontent? Must an entire nation now bear the consequences of the insane decisions of an elite that is gradually regaining control, or perhaps never lost it? And what about the members of the *International* who failed to grasp how easily propaganda about nationalist sentiments overshadowed the international solidarity of workers and farmers? Hadn't the Russian leaders as soon as they saw the opportunity done exactly the same by signing a kind of peace agreement that indirectly exacerbated the suffering on the Western Front? Where was their own international solidarity, not with the leaders they despise and by whom they are despised, but with the French, British, Belgian, and German workers' and farmers' sons who also toiled and perished in the mud? Could they have found nothing else to stop the carnage?

Now the Treaty of Versailles has come into effect, nothing stops the Ostend fishing fleet from returning to its home port. With his characteristic drive, shipowner John Bauwens establishes a new limited company, the *Steam Fisheries of the Belgian Congo*, resuming his project to explore fishing opportunities off the coast of Congo. As soon as Arseen Blondé, his crew, and their respective families enter Ostend harbour early 1920 with a trawler full of fish to distribute to the Ostend population, Bauwens asks Blondé to prepare a new voyage to Congo and resume the work interrupted by the war. So, Arseen

Blondé, commissioned by the shipping company, travels to England to search for a suitable ship for the expedition. On June 24, he returns with the *Boula Matari*. As soon as he enters the harbour, he learns a fishermen's strike is underway. Lucien learns from his father that the entire crew of Arseen immediately declare their solidarity with the striking fishermen. John Bauwens wants the *Boula Matari* immediately to depart for Congo, but Arseen only wants to undertake the voyage with a unionised crew and only when the strike is over. And then the shipowners demonstrate their power. Arseen is fired and cannot find employment with any other shipowner. The same thing happens to Captain Louis Zonnekeyn.

In early November, Lucien follows the report on another foreign trip by the royal couple, who docks in Zeebrugge after a state visit to Brazil. He hears how the King was enthusiastically received there as a true war hero. But what gave him far more satisfaction was the news that several union activists from the Ostend fishing community, led by Arseen, are traveling to Ghent to discuss with their Ghent comrades and Edward Anseele the untenable situation of working conditions and low wages imposed by the shipping companies. The socialist leader had long envisioned a production cooperative among the fishing community. As many years before the war as in 1900, during a debate with the industrialist and philanthropist Ernest Solvay, he had put forward this ideal, partly as a result of his visit to Oostende during another fishing strike when he delivered that speech which Arseen Blondé had heard as a child. During that debate with Ernest Solvay, he said, among other things: "*What a*

beautiful work could be accomplished with relatively limited resources! If a few sloops belonging to a cooperative association of Ostend fishermen could be launched on the North Sea, what a propaganda campaign would that be! All the Belgian, French, Dutch, German, Danish, and Norwegian fishermen would talk about it, would see them at work, and cooperative education would soon find its way into tens of thousands of working-class families". And now it might be possible to give shape to the idea when he hears the Ostend fishing delegation. But as soon as it becomes known in the fishing world that the socialists, who now control the *Bank of Labour* are considering setting up a shipping company, all political influence is deployed to thwart the initiators in every possible way. Ultimately, on October 1, 1921, they succeed. *NV Oostendsche Reederij (Oostendsche Shipping Company)* to be founded, not with a few sailing sloops as in the dream of over 20 years earlier, but with a fleet of ships from the Seamen's Association of which Arseen Blondé is chairman and where he becomes a captain on land. Shortly after, the *NV Les Frigorifères du Littoral* for refrigerated services is founded and the entire socialist enterprise in Oostende is known as *the Red Fleet*.

For several months now, those in Oostende who have little to do with fishing have been talking about another new development. In July, the Oostende-Stene airfield officially opened on the Steense Dijk, primarily for military purposes and airmail transport. Plane spotting, and perhaps witnessing a crash with one's own eyes, is quickly becoming a popular pastime.

Dendermonde is located between Ghent and Brussels. Lucien

Souris can therefore easily use train connections between the two cities to visit friends when he is free of duty. Many of his comrades move in socialist-anarchist circles. He sympathises with the anarchist cooperative and mutual benefit ideas, and he occasionally expresses this, even in his employment. During a visit to Ghent, with comrades from his only year at university, he hears about the pacifist movements that adopt the ideas of the internationalists and the pre-war Esperanto group, and those of socialist and Christian anarchists. One evening, they discuss Beatrice Cadbury, heiress to Cadbury Chocolate and her husband, Kees Boeke, both members of the non-dogmatic Christian Quaker community. Towards the end of the war they were deported to the Netherlands by the British government because of their active pacifism, including their public protest against conscription. Beatrice and her husband had also relinquished their shares and dividends from the Cadbury industry because of their anti-capitalist views. But friends, along with the Cadbury factory workers' council, decided to continue supporting the couple's activism. With the relinquished shares, they established a fund to finance the couple. The couple's pacifist stance made them hosts for the international peace conference, during which the *War Resisters International* was founded. Lucien reflects on its declaration of principles: *War is a crime against humanity. I am therefore determined not to support any form of war and to work for the elimination of all its causes.* In the aftermath of trench warfare and its horrors, he can certainly understand that statement. Putting it into practice seems almost impossible. Did he himself have the option of not

being drawn into the war in 1914? Would he have had any other options then than desertion? Did stretcher-bearers support the war, or not, when they voluntarily entered in unarmed service? He appreciates the symbolism of the broken rifle. Would he break his own rifle? With his experience, that would be equivalent to committing suicide. Is imprisonment, deportation, or flight the only thing a pacifist faces in a world dominated by capital, where today no one calls for war anymore, but all armies are currently reorganising? *Bellum*, not *pacem*, remains on the agenda, with all kinds of crazy theories going around…

Bellum, not *pacem*… in April of this year, the idea of the Solvay Conferences is revived, and the third physics conference was held, with the topic of "atoms and electrons". Given the post-war tensions, German scientists were not admitted to the conference. Although Albert Einstein had already renounced German citizenship in 1901 and adopted the Swiss one, he declined the invitation, while simultaneously publicly confirming his renunciation. Lucien reflected on this and concluded that, even in the scientific field, internationalism was currently lacking, and that the sense of nationality outweighed the sense of belonging to humanity in search of scientific answers to common questions. Behind the scenes, numerous military arguments were likely already being used, especially since it became clear during the war that military strategists were flouting international agreements and misusing chemical inventions to create deadly weapons. Atoms and electrons, therefore, must be studied in separate compartments. The

ingredients for future distrust and hatred are already present. Couldn't at least the inviting scientific researchers, with the caliber of participants at a Solvay Conference, accept and present the broken rifle? Apparently not.

Another year passes and in 1922 *Reserve Officer Lucien Souris* is still in Dendermonde. He hears from his parents and friends in Oostende that the entire city will have clean drinking water by the end of the year. New water towers are under construction, and those who don't have the luxury of tap water from the Bocq river at home will be able to get it from the fountains provided for this purpose for 5 centimes per 20 liters.

He hears with mixed feelings the news that almost the entire coastal region and the battlefields of the Westhoek are becoming something of a morbid tourist attraction. What should he make of this? Do people visit these places to remember their fallen relatives? Or are they simply eager for emotion? Do comrades who survived the hell with him feel like revisiting the locations? Perhaps, but he knows he has no desire to visit Houthulst, Schoorbakke, or Diksmuide for the time being. But when he hears that a hydrothermal institute is being planned for Oostende, his desire to return to civilian life grows stronger. He hopes to live on the coast again once he's discharged. Gradually, his engineering interest in chemistry and construction resurfaces. He ponders the improvement of building materials. He studies about chemical discoveries on his own and follows the reconstruction process.

Lucien feels how civilian life is gradually taking over military life internally. Charlotte Hofstadter is now nineteen, and he dares to

openly express his interest in her, because he's long had the impression that she feels affection for him. This has become increasingly clear since the day he first met her, when he and the forage master visited her father. Should he dare to ask her to become engaged to him?

The printed menu from an old friend's wedding feast helps. He conjures up an image of his own wedding feast, with Charlotte sitting next to him. Meanwhile, he's enjoying the feast immensely. It's wonderful to be able to enjoy such a meal again in peace and joy. After the Velvet Soup, there are little cheese and egg snacks. Then comes the Turbot in Mousseline Sauce, followed by a filet roti with young green peas. The Sweetbreads in a Mushroom Sauce are followed by a *cauliflower en Bellevue*. After dessert, cake and fruit follow. Wines and liqueurs are available, as is coffee.

The following week, Lucien invites Charlotte for a walk and asks her the question that had been on his mind for a while. Would she… yes, she would. A little shyly, Charlotte replies that he can call her Lotje and that together they'll have to convince her parents that they want to get married as soon as he's discharged from the army and his finances allow to do so. Lucien is overjoyed when he hears from Charlotte that she'd been waiting for his proposal for a while, and that she'd even worried he might never ask her.

Some time ago, a committee was formed in Oostende to erect a memorial for the fallen soldiers of the 3rd and 23rd Line Regiments. Many of these soldiers came from the region. The banner of the 3rd Line Regiment refers to its most important

achievements during the last war: *Antwerp, Grimde, Yser, Steenstraat, Clercken, campaign 1914-1918*. Lucien was present at some of these events and took part in other offensives that are not mentioned on the banner, but were equally deadly. More than a thousand soldiers of the 3rd and the twice-doubled 23rd Regiment died during these feats of arms. In February, an announced competition is won by sculptor Marcel Rau and architect Georges Hendrickx. The feats of arms depicted on the banner will be included on the monument. A bronze statue depicts the goddess of victory, who had previously served as inspiration for the inter-allied medal. This one is a winged female figure holding a laurel wreath. The bronze plaque is engraved with Yser-Houthulst-Steenstraat, and the stone pedestal is engraved with Yser-Steenstraat-Clercken. The pedestal refers to the list of names of 1,096 fallen officers, non-commissioned officers, and soldiers. The memorial is unveiled on September 3rd in the presence of Colonel Moulin who led the regiment during the war, accompanied by representatives of the King and the army leadership. During a short visit to Oostende, Lucien visits the memorial. It stands near the harbour bridges, under which as a child he played hide-and-seek or marbles with his playmates.

On his return to the barracks, an attempt is made to involve him in a discussion about the decision of the Lille city council to rename one of the major avenues into the *Avenue of the Belgian People*. Lille has a socialist municipal government, and according to many officers, this naming is a provocation. Some, of course know of Lucien's socialist sympathies but also of his appreciation

for the King. Why, some ask, not just an *Albert I Avenue* as a tribute to the Belgians, as other cities do. Isn't the King the personification of Belgian resistance to the German invasion? Others, however, believe with *Belgian people* the entire population is involved, and ultimately, among the Belgian population there are also those who benefited from the German occupation. Lucien says nothing, but chuckles a little when he thinks that a *Belgian Soldier Avenue* wouldn't have been that successful either. But he appreciates the Lille city council's choice. After all, he had considerable contact with the French during the rest periods at the front and when he was wounded, and he knows that it's about more than the King's resistance to the German Emperor when Belgium's neutrality was violated, or the resistance along the Iron Front. It also recognises a number of interventions by Belgian soldiers and civilian volunteers on French soil, including the protection of trenches or the undermining of German positions. But all in all, it is, of course, about the recognition of wartime actions, which may not contribute to lasting peace.

In April 1923, a strike breaks out among the dockworkers of Oostende that would last until June, 13 long weeks. The Seamen's Union, headed by Arseen Blondé and the NV *Ostend Shipping Company* immediately express solidarity with the strikers. For the duration of the strike, the shipping company distribute free fish up to twice a week to all 1,400 strikers. In practice, this means the shipping company buys its own catch and then distribute it. This in-kind assistance is a significant boost and makes the shipping company even more popular

among Ostend workers and fishermen.
Because of the strike and the solidarity surrounding it, another piece of Ostend news is being overlooked by many. On May 23, Belgium's national airline SABENA will start operating, replacing the small fleet of the previous *Study Unit*. The DH.9 operating the inaugural flight between Haren Airport near Brussels and Lympne in the United Kingdom will make a stopover at Oostende-Stene.

By mid-August 1923, Lucien is more than tired of the life in the barracks. The only thing that brings him much joy in Dendermonde is his relationship with Charlotte Hofstadter. Their engagement is all but official. All but official, because her family is somewhat resistant to her dating a man ten years her senior, who, moreover, was already a soldier when she was only 11. On Sundays, his father's butcher shop is still a tavern frequented by soldiers. Lucien is often there, officially to keep an eye on things. He is now 30 years old and his salary raises to 582 francs a month.
What Lucien truly longs for is the ease with which one can buy fresh fish in Oostende. That's not so easy inland, but his desire for good fish is so great he arranges for his own supply. To have real fish as it should be, as he discusses with one of his Ostend-born soldiers, one has to fetch it in the morning at the local coast fish market. So, he occasionally sends the soldier to the coastal city in the afternoon, with instructions to spend the night with his family and early the next day to buy the freshest fish possible at the fish market, which he will then rush to Dendermonde. It doesn't take long, of course his superior hears

about it. Even though he thinks it's a one-off, he's still not amused. The army isn't meant to meet some personal need for a reserve lieutenant who is thoroughly fed up with army life, he puts quite sharply. Nevertheless, the colonel takes Lucien's service record into account and will therefore do not more than a spoken *remonstrance*. But at the same time, Lucien is made to understand very clearly that if he repeatedly fails to strictly apply military regulations, even in peacetime, he will no longer be able to count on goodwill. He doesn't let it get to that point, and the fresh fish supply is suspended.

From January 1, 1924, Lucien earns 679 francs in salary. And on April 1, 1924, after ten years and six months in the army, he is finally authorised to transfer to civilian life as a reserve lieutenant.

He shows, even much later, his respect for King Albert I who stayed with his troops in the Westhoek while what he calls '*the conservative government*' remained safely in exile in Le Havre. He later became convinced that, however serious the death toll itself may be, the relatively smaller loss of life in the Belgian army, compared to the figures for the French and British, was the result of King Albert's obstinate decision not to allow his army to withdraw to France. This gave him the opportunity as Commander in Chief to independently decide how and when to deploy his troops in support of the sometimes fanciful plans of the French and British military leadership, which was sometimes less informed about the actual living conditions at the front.

Much later, Lucien still speaks fondly of the gratitude he received from his direct superiors. He appreciates his front

stripes which he received for fighting in the front lines, before the law of August 25, 1919, extended the area of the combat zones to include artillery range. The Yser Commemorative Medal is his most precious honour. But after six years of peacetime military service, he is glad to leave the monotony of barracks life. He doesn't have such unqualified respect for the often exclusively French-speaking professional officers. He finds many of them to have a blasé attitude and to often discuss feats of arms they only observed from afar. On his last afternoon in the officers' mess, with his discharge papers safely in his pocket, the conversations irritate him so much that he offers the following story to those present in his accent-less French: '*A hunter has been trying all day to shoot something and hasn't succeeded. Late in the afternoon, he returns home in a foul mood and finds a helpless sparrow in the street. Furious, he picks up the sparrow, puts it in his pocket, and thinks, "Now I've at least caught something!" He walks on and, at a crossroads, sees a huge pile of horse manure on the ground. Thinking of the sparrow, he takes the bird out of his coat pocket and places it in the dung heap, then continues on his way. The sparrow starts pecking at the dung heap, finds grains, and as it feeds, it burrows deeper and deeper into the heap. Its wings are stuck in it. Two passing children pull it out of the heap. The sparrow manages to escape from their grasp. It sits on a gutter and starts chirping with joy, so much so that a passing cat pounces on it and eats it. Moral of the story: 1. Whoever who pokes you in the shit is not necessarily your enemy. 2. Whoever pulls you out of the shit isn't necessarily your friend. 3. If you've been in the shit, don't shout it too loudly from the rooftops. Good*

afternoon, gentlemen'," he concludes. With that, he leaves the mess and puts an end to peacetime barracks life.

In peacetime… the reparation fees demanded to Germany are clearly too high, which is why there were already in difficulties last year, partly due to hyperinflation among the eastern neighbours. And now, after that unreasonable occupation of the Ruhr, a plan has been drawn up that seems equally impossible to him. It boils down to the United States financing Germany so that Germany can make reparations to France and the United Kingdom, which need money to repay their war loans to the United States. All of this seems a rather impossible course of action to him unless the American economy continues to grow indefinitely, thanks in part to the arms industry. And the reparations will run for the next sixty-five years…

A few days later, Lucien Souris visits Charlotte's family in civilian clothes. It turns into a long conversation, during which a few wrinkles are ironed out. He explains his plans. He has access to a small reserve fund from the investment of the compensation he received for his front stripes, and of course, he can still count on some support from his parents. Charlotte is completely fine with living on the coast, and arrangements are made for Lucien to look for a suitable job. If it's in the fishing industry, it will definitely be on land. He will discuss this with his father and his socialist friends.

It feels liberating to get off the train in Oostende in civilian clothes and walk to Cairo Street, without needing a permit granted by higher authorities. However, he is immediately confronted with the *Panorama of the Yser.* In a large roundabout,

built according to plans by architect Brenta and located near Ostend City Station, a huge canvas by Alfred Bastien depicts the Battle of the Yser. The painting is a whopping 115 meters long and 15 meters high. Is this a sign, Lucien thinks, that the city council and the Ostend merchants are "resolving their own '*tourist offer*' problems? Oostende is no longer aimed solely at the aristocracy and wealthy bourgeoisie as was the case before the war and especially during Leopold II's reign? Aren't there enough thermal bath tourists? Is this now also a wink to those who arrive here looking for the battlefields? Is this a way to persuade less affluent people to occupy the Ostend beach and not to look further afield, after a visit to Nieuwpoort?

The operators of the mineral water source at the *Pavilion* in Leopold Park are trying to attract regular customers. Starting this summer, the price per bath will be raised to 3 francs, but for 30 francs you can bath twelve times. Residents of Oostende only pay 2 francs per bath. The thermal institute *Hydro* is now also ready for use. Complete thermal spa treatments are offered here. The institute is located outside the more fashionable center of Oostende. Lucien doesn't know whether this also makes the spa more accessible to less affluent holidaymakers.

But for now he's not so interested in tourism and wants to learn more about the Red Fleet. He learned that at *NV Ostend Shipping Company* a captain today earns around 2,500 francs, an engineer 1,200, a helmsman 1,100, and a deckhand 600 to 700 francs. These wages are undeniably higher than those of any other shipping company. The Seamen's Union also ensures that the company insures the crew against occupational

accidents and covers their training. It is also becoming the largest shipping company, employing around 300 fishermen on 20 vessels.

But as mentioned, Lucien is more interested in working on land. He hopes to be able to put his self-study as engineer and his practical chemistry knowledge to good use. And that combination is difficult to put to good use in the fishing industry. Arseen Blondé suggests Lucien to sail with him to Ghent at the end of July, where a two-day international exhibition is being held by and about *Cooperatives and Social Works*. Lucien immediately agrees and volunteers to organize the voyage of the ships that will participate in the exhibition. The entire organisation is led by Arseen himself. Competing shipping companies, aided by conservative politicians from Oostende, want to hinder the exodus. Nevertheless, the "red fleet" is finally able to begin its journey to Ghent on July 26th, under pouring rain. After the departure of the *Louis Bertrand* five trawlers with crew and family members follow, including the Souris family. Then, three steam trawlers depart, carrying passengers, for whom tents had been pitched on deck due to the rain. The *Edward Anseele* closes the procession and leaves the harbour while the orchestra plays *The International*.

During the trip, Lucien speaks with several fellow travellers. He mentions his desire to work in Oostende as an engineer, perhaps even a chemical engineer. The fourth Solvay Conference on Physics is also discussed. Lucien knows that the topic this time concerns the electrical conductivity of metals and related subjects. Personally, he was more interested in the content of the

previous conference, the proceedings of which he reviewed as soon as they were publicly available. He says he attentively follows all publications that highlight chemical research, some of which were discussed at the Solvay conferences. But he is also familiar with the *'untold stories'* and tells us that, just as in 1921, the German and Austrian scientific community is once again unwelcome. This, in turn, results in Planck, Einstein, Sommerfeld, and Born, among others, not being present. He expresses his concern about the shortsightedness associated with organising these kinds of conferences and admits that he has previously considered the extent to which such options are not being suggested from a certain military quarter, which ultimately amounts to nationalistic interference in a philanthropic project, perhaps also because of its economic implications. Lucien now clearly demonstrates how he has used his free time in the barracks for self-study in mathematics and chemistry, ultimately pursuing a kind of engineering degree. A passenger involved in the *Bank of Labour* hears him, and the friendly conversations during the trip have an unexpected consequence: socialist friends suggest he to apply for the position of director of a brickworks in Koksijde. The company was founded shortly after the end of the war and produces sand-lime bricks primarily for export to Great Britain. The *Bank of Labour* invested in the company after it received a permit to establish itself in a dune area where sand extraction was already underway during the war to supply the front with sandbags. Lucien not only has the practical experience to manage the company's approximately 25 employees, but his chemical

expertise can also help him introduce the bricks to the Belgian market. Moreover, he is free to conduct experiments to improve this type of building material. The factory manager's salary is considerably higher than what he earned in the army.

Lucien doesn't think about it for long. He applies and gets the job. With the contract in hand, he travels to Dendermonde to officially propose to Lotje. Then he returns to the coast accompanied by his future bride and her mother. Together they visit several houses in Koksijde and decide to rent a comfortable, fairly large house in Oostduinkerke, where they prepare for their wedding. On September 25, 1925, the time had come. Lucien and Charlotte marry in Dendermonde Town Hall. The menu for the celebratory meal that followed looked promising: after the *various hors d'oeuvres* follows the *Queen's Consommé* and the indispensable *Normandy Sole*.There is a *Beef Fillet Jardiniere.* The mid-snack is a *Vol au Vent Toulouse*, after which the *Brussels Chicken and Salad* follows. The meal ends with *Ice Creams, Cakes, Fruits and Desserts*.

The day after the party, the young couple leaves for Oostduinkerke. Their house is not far from the brickworks. where Lucien takes up his directorship. Both hope for a carefree time, with festive evenings whenever possible, now that foxtrot and Charleston are popular dances and jazz is becoming increasingly popular.

Lucien thinks little about his wartime adventures in the years before he met Lotje. When he's not at the factory, he and Lotje listen to the gramophone he's installed at home, alternating jazz records with French chansons. Lotje gradually learns a lot of

French. One of the records conjures up images from the war in his mind. Although he's never personally considered deserting, he often listens to *The song of Craonne* in Raymond Lefebre's version:

Quand au bout d'huit jours le r'pos terminé
On va reprendre les tranchées,
Notre place est si utile
Que sans nous on prend la pile
Mais c'est bien fini, on en a assez
Personne ne veut plus marcher
Et le cœur bien gros, comm' dans un sanglot
On dit adieu aux civ'lots
Même sans tambours, même sans trompettes
On s'en va là-haut en baissant la tête

Refrain: Adieu la vie, adieu l'amour,
Adieu toutes les femmes
C'est bien fini, c'est pour toujours
De cette guerre infâme
C'est à Craonne sur le plateau
Qu'on doit laisser sa peau
Car nous sommes tous condamnés
Nous sommes les sacrifiés

Huit jours de tranchée, huit jours de souffrance
Pourtant on a l'espérance
Que ce soir viendra la r'lève
Que nous attendons sans trêve
Soudain dans la nuit et dans le silence
On voit quelqu'un qui s'avance
C'est un officier de chasseurs à pied
Qui vient pour nous remplacer
Doucement dans l'ombre sous la pluie qui tombe
Les petits chasseurs vont chercher leurs tombes

Refrain

C'est malheureux d'voir sur les grands boulevards
Tous ces gros qui font la foire
Si pour eux la vie est rose
Pour nous c'est pas la même chose
Au lieu d'se cacher tous ces embusqués
F'raient mieux d'monter aux tranchées
Pour défendre leur bien, car nous n'avons rien
Nous autres les pauv' purotins
Tous les camarades sont enterrés là
Pour défendr' les biens de ces messieurs là

Refrain

Ceux qu'ont l'pognon, ceux-là r'viendront
Car c'est pour eux qu'on crève
Mais c'est fini, car les trouffions
Vont tous se mettre en grève
Ce s'ra votre tour, messieurs les gros
De monter sur le plateau
Car si vous voulez faire la guerre
Payez-la de votre peau

He believes this poem expresses his own thoughts on that war quite well. It became the enormous slaughter of countless children of ordinary people at the service of arrogant figures who had initiated that war primarily out of self-interest or class interests. *Para bellum si vis bellum* seems more appropriate than the adagio attributed to Publius Renatus *si vis pacem para bellum*, thinks Lucien Souris, who as a young man was torn away from his previous bohemian life to become a soldier.
And the years of that past have given that good-natured anarchist something else. Since the newspaper's founding in the midst of war, Lucien became a reader of *Le canard enchaîné*, a practice that would remain for the rest of his life. The

newspaper immediately established its position. The editorial staff is said to continue to fight against censorship and *brain fog*. From a pacifist and anti-militarist stance, it speaks out critically against profit-makers of all kinds.
The well-humoured anarchist is now a critical factory director, often working with the workers and involving them in adjusting working conditions or discussing production. The factory isn't quite a workers' cooperative, but he does have that model in mind for the policies he implements.

In mother's footsteps

In Tienen, Jeanne would not live to see her son's efforts to realise his dream. But she would also not witness the new madness that resurfaced less than twenty years later. She succumbed to the virulent flu that gripped large parts of the world for two years at the end of the war and died in late spring 1919 on the large farm of Lodewijk's cousins. At sixteen, Louis is a war orphan. In August, he entrusts his 14-year-old brother and his two sisters, aged 10 and 8, to the care of his cousin Armand and his wife and leaves for Lier, where he begins his teacher training in the temporary wooden barracks erected for the National Normal School on Boomlaarstraat, now the school had left the orphanage in the Beguinage.

As a student, Louis quickly becomes quite popular with his teachers. His extensive knowledge, resulting from conversations with his mother during the last two years of her life, often leads him to ask additional questions and inquire about further reading.

He feels encouraged by the way the Rijksnormaalschool (National Normal School) emphasises professional competence and methodological knowledge of educational models that embody constitutional freedoms. During the final year of his studies, he even participates in two study trips to the Netherlands, where he learns more about the *Reform pedagogy*. A visit to the University of Amsterdam puts him on the trail of Professor Kohnstamm, who, on behalf of the *Tot 'Nut Association* provides a scientific basis for the subject Personality in Development, which is taught in the Netherlands. Kohnstamm is responsible for the *Nuts*seminarie voor Pedagogie (Pedagogical Foundation), which promotes educational innovation in primary schools. For example, the subject of reading comprehension, or silent reading, is introduced, which further substantiates the concept that reading is more than just deciphering a code. After all, purely synthetic spelling methods still entice many educators, and changing that remains difficult. Louis also hears about Kees Boeke, who later became will found his *Children's Community Workshop*.

At the Rijksnormaalschool (National Normal School), the ideas of Dr. Montessori and Miss Parkhurst are discussed. Louis is very interested in what that teacher has to say about her work with mildly physically handicapped children. In Rome, Miss Parkhurst had encountered Montessori's work during her internship and adopted many of her suggestions. But when goes back to the town of Dalton, she pays more attention to student cooperation thus making individual work more efficient. Towards the end of his training, Louis reads an intervention by Miss Parkhurst in which she says she sees the school more as a sociological

laboratory. Some of his teachers point out that the word "laboratory" is a rather unfortunate term in the educational world. It evokes a place where researchers conduct clinical experiments on children. But as far as Louis understands Helen Parkhurst simply means that she assumes the students can work experimentally both individually and in groups, and that they take responsibility for the tasks they undertake. According to her, children should not be victims of a complex and crystallised system that develops without their knowledge. She writes somewhere: *'Let us see the school as a place that functions as a community, just like life itself'* and that fits in very well with the ideas that his mother and his grandmother had.

But one of the reasons why the National Normal School is paying attention to what some call the Parkhurst Plan and what Miss Parkhurst prefers to call the Dalton Plan is the way freedom is interpreted. Freedom to work without a fixed schedule doesn't mean anything goes. Freedom has to do with the ability to take on work of one's own free will, which increases job satisfaction and leads to agreements with the rest of the community. It's not about individually focused education like Dr. Montessori who, Louis believes, in a sense harks back to the preceptor model. Here, consultation is necessary to combine individually chosen work with the introduction of new subjects through weekly or monthly assignments or the completion of error corrections when that can only be done in a group setting.

Louis immerses himself in the work of Helen Parkhurst, revisiting John Dewey and discovering the young psychologist Jean Piaget. Piaget develops a concept that children evolve from

egocentrism to sociocentrism during their development. Therefore, Louis believes Montessori's proposals for an individual approach may be useful with preschoolers, while Helen Parkhurst's sociological laboratory becomes meaningful for teachers working with older children.

The first post-war decade was fruitful in the continuation of pedagogical ideas and innovation. The slogan '*never again war*', heard almost everywhere in Europe shortly after the armistice, seems to be penetrating even conservative circles as the horror stories of trench warfare become more widely known. The demand for more and better education is being reluctantly conceded. This comes mainly from progressive, internationally oriented federations and associations that are reviving the old international pacifist dreams. Louis reads Parkhurst and Dewey, ponders Piaget, and writes to Edward Peeters. Of course Edward is shocked to hear of Jeanne's death. However he is pleased that Louis is choosing to become primary school teacher. Furthermore, upon returning home after the war, he writes that he found his house in Oostende in a pitiful state. It had also been completely ransacked. Nevertheless, he decides to take up again teaching at an Ostend municipal school. He hopes to be able to work in the same progressive way as he did in Oostburg with the children of Belgian refugees, but the predominantly Catholic city council refuses him permission to do so. He says there's little local support for giving children greater freedom to work. There's still a strong emphasis on dogmatic education, which he considers oppressive. That's one of the reasons he's busy rebuilding his national and international network of

contacts. He explains he founded the *Schoolblad voor Vlaanderen (School Journal for Flanders)* at the end of last year and that he's considering taking on the development of a Flemish Educational Library.

In France, Célestin Freinet has also been discharged from military service and can return to teaching, although not without difficulties. Shortly after his first appointment as a substitute during the war, he was called up for active duty himself on April 10, 1915. A year later, he was assigned to the infantry. On April 16, 1917, it was snowing in northern France when his battalion was deployed in the offensive at Chemin des Dames Ridge. That day, the infantry was expected to clear the first German lines immediately after artillery breached the German defense. The French army would then reach Laon that same evening. According to infantry regulations from earlier that year, infantrymen were required to attack in assault gear. According to the same regulations, this consisted of a blanket wrapped in canvas around the neck, an individual tool, a food bag, and a grenade bag theoretically containing five grenades, two of which were Viven-Bessières shells fired from rifles, each weighing about half a kilo. Sometimes, however, up to 16 grenades were distributed per man. In addition, each soldier had to carry a two-liter can of water, an additional one-liter can, a gas mask or two if possible, earth bags, a signalling board or Bengal fire, bandages, provisions for the day, and 120 rounds of ammunition. Some units attacked with everything on their backs, and a few even with provisions for a whole week. The offensive lasted not days, but weeks with interruptions in

between passing to months. On October 23, 1917, the eve of the final capture of the Chemin les Dames summit, Célestin Freinet was seriously wounded in the right lung by a bullet in Gobineaux Forest. During his long recovery, Célestin Freinet wrote about his feelings as he was left with his wound in a shell hole in the ground, until a field doctor pinned a label on him, ordering him to be taken to hospital. During this single offensive, approximately 180,000 young Frenchmen and 165,000 young Germans were killed or evacuated with serious wounds.

When, after the war, Freinet was sought to be honoured as a mutilated war hero, he refused recognition, fearing that he would be relegated to light administrative duties instead of being appointed as a teacher. He claimed wanting to testify against what he called the murderous horror from which only the wealthy profit. He wants to stand up against the conditioning and education that began at an early age in school and that prepares minds for belligerent aggression by inflaming nationalistic sentiments. On January 1, 1920, he is assistant teacher in Bar-Sur-Loup. He writes for the magazine *the Emancipated School* and seeks connections with the *New Education* movement. He also reads Dewey and hears about Decroly's work. In his classroom, he makes teaching more visual, including nature walks with the children. When he is offered a teaching position in Brignoles in 1922, he choses to stay in Bar-Sur-Loup and continue his walking class experiment.

Meanwhile, and without any connection to the *League for New Education*, Rudolf Steiner takes over a school for the children of

the Waldorf-Astoria cigarette factory. He does so at the request of the factory's owner Emil Molt who says he wants to bring the children of workers and directors closer together. The school is named the Free Waldorf School. With this, the initiators want to make it clear that the government has no say in the teaching methods at the school. Co-education and the meaning of the word *free* seem somewhat like the ideals of Francisco Ferrer, with his *Modern School* in Barcelona. But it only appears that way. Steiner is also convinced that the spirit must develop free from any coercion. But where the *Escuela Moderna* placed a strong emphasis on the cooperation of children of different ages and in setting up work projects, Rudolf Steiner relies on his own views on child psychology. Adults determine the curriculum based on the stage a group of children is in, taking as its starting point what he calls anthroposophical anthropology. A higher spiritual world shapes the physical world. The experience of art and the full development of the soul are essential. Steiner posits a fourfold view of humanity: the physical body corresponding to the mineral kingdom, the etheric body corresponding to the plant kingdom, the astral body to the animal kingdom, and the ego body to the human kingdom. These bodies are only perceptible supernaturally, with the exception of the physical body. Moreover, these four bodies are not born simultaneously and develop in seven-year phases ending at the age of 21. When Louis becomes acquainted with this model, he does appreciate the idea of co-education. But as a convinced non-dogmatic liberal, he has difficulty with the anthroposophical aspect of Steiner's proposal.

In southern Europe, the leaders of the young Portuguese Republic are licking their wounds after their rather rash venture of sending troops into the trenches of northern France relatively late in the war. Here too, the military leadership was clearly unprepared for this kind of war, which cost the lives of many young Portuguese. After the armistice, abandoned projects emerge, including those of António Sérgio. He studied at the Jean Jacques Rousseau Institute in Geneva during the war and is very familiar with the ideas of the *New School*. A new decree defines in detail the operating standards of schools, the conditions of the facilities, and the respective equipment. Emphasis is placed on early childhood education, with materials for preschool mentioned, making clear references to Maria Montessori and Fröbel. The guidelines for primary school are characterised by the pedagogical methods Sérgio discusses. These guidelines include three grades and co-education. But it is often noted that the government issues numerous decrees without providing the resources to implement them. This criticism is even heard among republican-minded and unionised teachers. For the first time in their union history, teachers strike not so much against school boards or work orientation, but against the general lack of means to support themselves, as part of a general strike wave of all state employees. The conservative press launches a hate campaign against public primary school teachers. Terms such as "*anarchists*", "*bunch of revolutionary terrorists*", "*Bolsheviks*", "*crazy people*" and "*incompetents*" often appear in hateful opinion pieces.

Louis records little of what he knows or thinks about all these

initiatives in Europe. He knows Henrietta Swan Levitt, whose life story his mother often cited to defend the right to education and study for everyone, including the deaf and blind, dies at the end of 1921. Although already considered a brilliant mind among astronomers, she was never able to determine her own research. Annie Jump Cannon, a work-companion of Henrietta Swan Levitt and also deaf, continues to classify the stars. Poorer paid than her male colleagues, despite the general recognition of her competence, she, like other women, has to hear that she should take her place as a woman at home. Only during the war, especially at the moment many young men went to the front, even in the scientific world the work of women, considered more natural. And that has now come to an end. During his study trip to the Netherlands, Louis learns that Annie Cannon received a doctorate *honoris causa* in mathematics and astronomy from the University of Groningen. He wonders if her work would have become as well known if the United States had not participated in the war… but it is good to hear that in the world of mathematics and astronomy, women continue to claim their place. Unfortunately, they remain in the minority and often come from more affluent families. Then he hears talk about Cecília Payne whose father died when she was only four and, thanks to her intelligence, won a grant two years ago to study at the *Newnham College* at the University of Cambridge. He heard that Cecília was particularly interested in physics and chemistry. Like many others, she had listened with rapt attention to Arthur Eddington's presentation about his expedition to the island of Principe where he provided photographic evidence for

Einstein's general theory of relativity during a solar eclipse. She later reportedly said that the presentation had caused such a shock to her worldview that it almost felt like a nervous breakdown.
Louis thinks of his mother. How he would love to talk to her right now about this, and also about what else he'd heard during his two visits to the Netherlands.

Ten years after the war began and six years after its end, the consequences still reverberate. This is probably why Europe's educational systems are also undergoing rapid development. Educators and teachers often attempt to rid these systems of classroom routines that mindful of the ideas of Lancaster or La Salle only lead to subservience.

The Belgian parliament is quickly implementing the Poullet Act. Child labour must be curbed, but industry also needs better basic education and training for workers. Given that all children aged 6 to 14 are now subject to compulsory schooling, one could say this indirectly represents a kind of democratization of education. A Royal Decree of September 1924 published new organic regulations for the Royal Athenaeum. These now have three departments: Greek-Latin Humanities, Latin Humanities, and New Humanities. In the classical departments, the number of hours of Greek and Latin is reduced to make way for more mother tongue and sciences. And yet, Louis believes, by retaining these three departments, there is still a diversity of knowledge transfer at a stage where all knowledge should be accessible to everyone. Moreover, the Athenaeum is primarily

intended for those who study longer than the legal limit, as long as the fourth grade of primary education exists. Girls are also allowed to attend classes at the Athenaeum, as there are no secondary state institutions exclusively for girls. But of course the general social conditions of the country mean that many working-class children, boys and girls, never get to attend high school.

Louis reads in the *School magazine for Flanders* Edward is launching the *Flemish Educational Association* in addition to the *Flemish Educational Library*. He is its first chairman. He announces that he isn't proposing an ideal upbringing, but rather that he wants to instil in all his readers a pedagogical awareness so they can think for themselves about the "ideal upbringing". He argues education is a matter of experience, intuition, and common sense. Louis can understand that. He thinks of his great-grandmother's Barn-school. He has no knowledge of the School House on Keizerskaai, some century and a half ago. Edward Peeters has particular doubts about what he calls modern scientific pedagogy, the result of which is that teachers are often forced to work according to a fixed pattern. This seems unnatural to him, given that each child's personal world differs. Keeping that world in mind, he believes, is the meaning of "*putting the child first*". According to him, co-education, independent work and information processing are part of the learning process to prepare for life. Children then possess a more personal knowledge. Despite his doubts about academic pedagogues Edward advises those who move in that world to at least read Maria Montessori or Jan Ligthart. In this

regard, he seems to think more about mathematics than didactics. Edward sees the extension of compulsory education as an opportunity to give more shape to his ideas. But opposition from conservative church circles remains strong, even in the municipal schools where he works. According to these circles, co-education, freedom, and further *Reform* pedagogical ideals are incompatible with those of the church. Edward, a staunch Catholic, is even accused of heresy. He claims to have only a better education for the people in mind, an education that could help to prevent insane wars. When he is repeatedly refused the directorship of an Ostend primary school, he retires from teaching and began writing children's stories and fairy tales under the pseudonym Paul Kiroul.

Louis is quite familiar with Montessori's work. After reading Edward, he searches the library of the Normal School for the essays *About Education* by Ligthart. He appreciates Ligthart's irony when he talks about the exams and the examiner in *About a blessing and a curse.* In it, he reflects on ready knowledge and the use of reference works. Louis fully agrees with the passage: "*There will be people who think that a 'civilised person' should know all sorts of things. Well, I mean this too; the question is what is meant by that 'all sorts of things'*." He chuckles when he reads the report of a debate evening, in which Ligthart is questioned by academics about the importance of the geography exam and then gives the questioner the counter-question: "*Would you mind listing the tributaries of the Danube for me?*," which is shouted by others "*Stop it!*" Ligthart concludes: "*The argument was quickly won. Those gentlemen didn't dare take an exam that*

was administered to their children." Louis attentively reads what Ligthart writes about the meaning of memory and ready knowledge, which is different for everyone. This ready knowledge is the result of using experience in conjunction with learning the correct use of written information. The experience a future physician must gain, Louis believes, is different from that of a pianist, an engineer, or a teacher. Louis is less interested in how Ligthart incorporates the creed in his essays, such as in *Illusion and experience.*

In Switzerland, the pedagogues of the *Ligue pour l'Éducation Nouvelle* did not sit idle. Neutrality was not violated here and the Jean Jacques Rousseau Institute and initiatives such as *la maison des petits* (*the little ones' house)* develop further during the war years. After the war years and partly due to the work of Adolphe Ferrière, the *League* regains rapidly its international character of the pre-war period. This league included not only pedagogues working in Switzerland, such as Claparède and Ferrière themselves, but also Ovide Decroly, Maria Montessori, António Faria de Vasconcelos, Alexandre Neill, and Paul Geheeb. When Edward Peeters retires from teaching his friend Adolphe Ferrière takes over the leadership of the B.I.D.E., and the headquarters move to Geneva. In 1925, B.I.D.E. is renamed B.I.E. the *International Bureau of Education.* Although Edward himself finds it difficult to no longer be personally involved with the office that moved the secretariat to Switzerland, he does recognise that such an office can no longer be a one-man business from West Flanders.

In France, innovative educational ideas are seemingly less attacked than in Belgium. Célestin Freinet is able to further develop his school experiment. In 1922, he has the opportunity to travel to Germany, where he visits the libertarian schools of Hamburg. Freinet has his doubts. He considers libertarian schools too individualistic. He wonders how long it would take for children to spontaneously cooperate and whether it is useful to incorporate little or no adult experience. He writes about this in *the Emancipated School* and in *Clarté* (*Clarity)*, the magazine of the French communist students. In 1923 he participates in the congress of *L.I.E.N.*, the *International League for New Education*, where he meets Adolphe Ferrière personally, as well as Roger Cousinet and Ovide Decroly. The staunch agnostic Freinet develops a close friendship with the very religious Ferrière. In the following years, he would often refer to Ferrière's book *the Active School.* At the congress Freinet hears Paul Geheeb about the Odenwaldschule. But Freinet is more interested in the people's school, the school where he can educate children in pacifism and cooperation, thus contributing to the eradication of nationalist-tinged war violence. According to him, Paul Geheeb's school is a school for the bourgeoisie. He states later that his two main references are Ovide Decroly and John Dewey. And during the summer of 1924, Freinet purchases what would give his teaching a new and decisive direction. In October, he brings this purchase, a printing press, into the classroom, and from then on, he encourages children to write and print their own texts. This proved such a success that he established correspondence between classes, fully utilising his knowledge of Esperanto.

In Portugal, a republican wind continues to blow despite fierce opposition from the very conservative Catholic Church. João Camoesas is developing a proposal for educational reform that, according to him, embodies the republican objective: only with a well-formed society a better country can be built. According to the minister, early childhood education must be free and continuous. His proposal includes three categories: general, special, and higher education. General education has three levels. The first level comprises four years of free preschool education in preschools, for children aged three to six, which is not compulsory. The network of preschools will be expanded as soon as the country's economic circumstances permit. The pedagogical background includes *the active school* and ideas by the *L.I.E.N.* distributed with contributions from Faria de Vasconcelos and António Sérgio. But such a bold reform requires funding which is in short supply, partly due to the war. Approximately one-third of the teachers are unemployed, and general strikes rage for better wages and a five-day workweek of 25 hours, with Thursday as a day off. This privilege, dating back to the monarchy, had been abolished by the Republic. Nevertheless, in 1923, the National Congress of Teachers gave its approval in principle to the foundations of the reform. The minister and the staff responsible for implementing the reform were present. But when the Congress reconvened a year later, in August 1924, the atmosphere was completely different. João Camoesas was no longer a minister, and his reform wasn't even discussed in parliament. The gap between the progressive republicans and the conservative minority is wide, and not only

regarding the reform.

After the Dalton plan becomes better known in England in 1920 thanks to an article in the pedagogical supplement of the *Times*, it is now, four years later, being introduced in many primary and secondary schools. This is of interest to the *Association tot 't Nut* in the Netherlands, and a committee is sent to England to see how such a school works in practice. After an extensive article was published under the title *Scholen in Losser Klasverband (Schools in Looser Class Association)*. Will Miss Parkhurst's work proposals also become legally possible in primary schools in the Netherlands?

In 1924, 41-year-old Alexander Neill starts the private school Summerhill in Lyme Regis. He had previously been involved for several years with a libertarian school in Dresden. Neill, who in 1921 participated in the congress of the *International League for New Education* places himself outside the group of progressive libertarian educators. He argues they advocate for an overly benign authority in childrearing, which he finds more treacherous than overt authority. But he believes both forms of authority are unnecessary. Even well-intentioned imposed authority cannot be justified. He is convinced adults claim authority because of their need for power, and that this motivates a form of repression. According to him, his philosophy aims to preserve happiness by avoiding repressive habits in society. He claims that, unlike Fröbel, he does not view children with romantic innocence. Children have animal characteristics *from which they must outgrow with time and in freedom.* At his school, he establishes a system of self-governance among the

children. He does this because, according to him, freedom is not complete individual freedom, but the freedom to act without permission to infringe on someone else's freedom. Adults can and should protect children from danger without be trampled on their ability to self-regulate. According to Neill, adults and children have equal rights as human beings. When these rights are not balanced between parents and children, you get families with "disciplined" or with "spoiled" children. Young people should not be given gratification for everything, Neill adds, admitting having great contempt regarding spoiled children.

In Germany, libertarian and *Reform*-ideas are mainly discussed in free education.

The Hamburg pedagogues go to extremes with the postulate that one '*must start from out the child*'. They reject not only the idea that the state or church should decide what children should learn, but also the concept of a specific educational goal. According to them, school is not a means to prepare someone for life, but a place in life itself. They write, among other things: '*We refuse to be guided in our schoolwork by the demands of the profession, of economic life, of the struggle for existence. This is why we have no plan, no fixed educational goal. For us, the school's task is to offer children a place where they can be young and happy, without regard for goals to be achieved, a place where children develop a sense of responsibility toward the people they interact with*'. So the content of the learning process depends entirely on what the children wanted to learn. The lack of a program is accompanied by a lack of rules and punishments. The teacher-comrades refused to exercise any authority over the

group. After a chaotic start, they say, the students themselves took the initiative to create a minimum of order so that work could proceed.

For Paul Geheeb, the Weimar Republic ultimately proved to be a more favourable terrain for the *Odenwaldshule* to expand beyond the Imperial regime before and during the war. At the time, he refused to celebrate German victories or the Kaiser's birthday, while he did so for the birthdays of those he considered school heroes. His indifference to the symbol of German power and his public coolness toward national enthusiasm frequently led to friction with the authorities and with his patriotically minded friends. In 1918, the threat of the school's closure was looming. Geheeb did express some regret at the disappearance of the autonomous small German principalities. He feared, above all, a certain cultural impoverishment. Meanwhile, Paul Geheeb and his wife are raising the profile of their school as members of the *Union of Free and Boarding Schools in the German Countryside*. And as already mentioned, they participate in the conferences of the *International League for New Education*, where by the way they enjoy a great deal of interest. They are currently actively helping to create the German branch of the *League.* Paul says about his school: '*We must educate young people for courage and fighting spirit, people who will not cowardly adapt to this world, so corrupt in so many ways; people who will have learned to swim against the tide, to independently resist externally imposed fashions and conventions, including those in the spiritual realm and those today called "modern". At rural boarding schools, boys and girls learn to*

be responsible members of a small community, ready to later, as citizens, dedicate themselves with all their strength to the well-being of the nation. This is how the new youth will be able, far beyond the confines of their homes, to work towards a complete transformation of human society.'

Meanwhile, Rudolf Steiner continues to expand his Waldorf school model reaching far beyond Germany's borders. He now definitively shapes anthroposophical spirituality and curative pedagogy. He also devotes considerable attention to the construction of a new *Goetheanum*, a kind of place for reflection, after the first wooden building burned down completely at the end of 1922. According to Steiner it was a criminal fire. He claims to have not long before narrowly escaped an attack on his life in Munich. He considers the rioters who would soon call themselves fascists the instigators. Steiner decides to give up public lectures in Germany and establishes the *Community of Christians*. On behalf of that community, he gives lectures in various places in Central Europe, London and The Hague. Then Steiner founds the *Universal Anthroposophical Society* of which he becomes chairman. He starts the *Free School for Humanities*. On January 1, 1924, just two years after the *Goetheanum* fire, Steiner claims they want to poison him. He completes the model of the second *Goetheanum*. In Jena, the *curative pedagogy* starts up. In July takes place the *Anthroposophical and educational conference* in Arnhem. When Steiner becomes bedridden at the end of the year, he decides to follow up the guidelines regarding the construction of the Goetheanum and works on the concept of anthroposophical medicine. He dies on October 1, 1925.

In the summer of 1925, Célestin Freinet is sent by the *League*, as part of a delegation to visit the Soviet Union. The delegation is shown several schools and meets with officials from the teachers' union. The delegation also reads a translated article by Nadezhda Krupskaya, widow of Vladimir Lenin, written for the Polytechnic School, titled *The teacher's preparation*. At the time of their visit, Nadezhda was People's Commissar of Education. She has a thorough knowledge of the works of Comenius, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, Constantin Ouchinsky, Tolstoy, and John Dewey. She studied applied educational systems, particularly during her travels to London, Paris, Brussels, Berlin, and Geneva. At the time of Dewey writes *Democracy and Education*, she herself makes the finishing touches to *Public Education and Democracy* in which she structures the future evolution of Marxist pedagogy. The group knows that Nadezhda formulates clear, often controversial ideas. Many remember how among all the revolutionaries at the Soviet Congress she was the only one to protest against the embalming of Lenin's body and the construction of a mausoleum. She said at the time: "*Don't let your mourning for Illitch take the form of external reverence for his person. Don't erect monuments, don't give his name to palaces, don't perform ceremonies in his memory; he attached so little importance to it, it all weighed so heavily on him. Think of the poverty that still prevails in the country. If you wish to honour Vladimir Illitch's memory, build nurseries, kindergartens, houses, schools, libraries, medical centers, hospitals, and accommodations for the sick, and above all, let us put his principles into practice.*.'

During the delegation's visit, they discuss the country's rapid literacy and the schools that have been built everywhere. When confronted with the claim that proletarian children have the best and bourgeois children are treated less well, Nadezhda says she is not the only one who has consistently voiced strong objections to discrimination against certain children, but that this problem indeed still exists.

When discussing the glorification of progress, someone claims to have heard that fairy tale books are no longer available in stores because fairy tales are lies. Célestin Freinet then writes in his notebook that this is also changing partly at the recommendation of the People's Commissar for Education. The conversation then focuses primarily on pedagogy, because that is ultimately the People's Commissar's passion. She says she is convinced that a socialist society must give students themselves a prominent place in the school system and believes that self-management of the school should instil in them the habit of solving the problems they face together, through collective efforts. In this context, she mentions, among others, the work of Anton Makarenko in very unusual circumstances.

Célestin Freinet is enthusiastic about this visit and cannot help but express his appreciation for the in his view simple way in which Nadezhda Krupskaya is receiving a group of young foreign teachers. He compares the content of the conversation with another one he had with Maria Montessori, of which he says: '*She fears confronting the great figures of our time who perpetuate the slums and the misery; she limits herself to a role of pedagogue by denying within herself all the decisive influences she had denounced.*

Spirituality, of course! We are not enemies. Yet, it is necessary to know where this spirituality comes from and whether it is very useful to have freed the child from adults in order to burden it once again with the tyranny of words and philosophical notions that, at the very least, can be said to have had their day.'

During the summer of 1925, the Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky embarks on his only foreign trip. He meets German colleagues on his way to London where he attends a conference on working with deaf and blind children, or children with physical disabilities. The topic of discussion is the right of all children to education and how teachers should be trained for that task. Although Jean Piaget is not present, Lev Vygotsky resolves to review some of his Swiss colleague's articles.

Three years before that London Congress, the *International Astronomical Union* resolve to formally adopt on May 9, 1922, Annie Cannon's star classification system. That same year, Annie Cannon spent six months in Arequipa, Peru, photographing stars of the Southern Hemisphere. Her academic career as a deaf woman would serves as a valuable illustration for congressional representatives working on the right of all children to education. Even in the United Kingdom and despite her studies Cecilia Payne is unable to obtain a degree at the University of Cambridge just because she is a woman. In this conservative country she is only allowed to work as a teacher. She is aware that to pursue research, she would have to move to the United States. She seeks funding. In 1923, she is introduced to the director of the Harvard College Observatory who is launching a postgraduate program in astronomy. She receives a grant to

encourage women to work at the observatory and leaves Britain.

In 1920, Georges Barnich and Georges Hostelet became co-directors of the *Solvay Institute for Sociology*. Under their directorship, this Institute appears not to be immune to the eugenics movement that has recently set minds on fire almost everywhere in the world. In early October 1922, the *International Commission for Eugenics* met in Brussels. The chairman of the commission, Major Leonard Darwin, delivers a speech at the Institute entitled "*Eugenics*". Professor Doctor Wimmer from Copenhagen was also allowed to take to the podium with his presentation '*Mental heredity*'. On October 10th, during a meeting in the main hall of the Solvay Institute, the institute's eugenics chamber will be inaugurated.
Louis learns that this chamber is actually the Belgian National Office for Eugenics. This surprises and worries him. He hopes that Eugenics won't get bad.
Louis wouldn't hear about Lev Vygotsky's work until much later, but he did follow the speeches and writings of Hellen Keller, who now enjoys worldwide fame. She's an advocate for people with disabilities. This could be a good counterbalance to the sometimes disturbing proposals of the eugenicists, Louis believes. Although Hellen is a proponent of contraception she has given motivational speeches in over twenty countries about the living conditions of deaf people. Moreover, she is a suffragette, pacifist, and radical socialist. Louis also knows that Helen Keller, along with George Kessler, founded during the war the *Helen Keller International organisation*. This organisation conducts research in the fields of vision, health, and nutrition. In

1916, it supported the *National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People* (NAACP). She then declared herself ashamed of the unchristian treatment of "coloured people" in the Southern States.

In 1925, the young Louis Demeester is teaching at a municipal school near Tienen. Fueled by ideas, he graduated in July 1922. By September of the same year, he had already been appointed to the school. Montessori and Ligthart, but especially Dewey and Decroly are his sources of inspiration. He tries to make his lessons visual and creates himself some tools to help the youngest children with arithmetic, based on what he knew from Fröbel and Montessori. Unbeknownst to him, Louise Lafendel and Mina Audemars were also developing their own ideas at the *Maison des Petits* with similar material.

Between Tienen and Koksijde

We are in the second half of the 1920s of the Christian calendar (the 119th hectoyear). Louis Demeester is still single and rents a house in Tienen.

Lucien Souris and Charlotte Hofstadter have been married for almost a year and live in Oostduinkerke. While visiting Lucien's parents in Oostende the young couple strolls into the city center. Some streets have changed names since Lucien's childhood. *Comedieplein* is now *Marie-Joséplein*, and *Weststraat* is now *Adolph Buylstraat*. They walk through the street and look at the shop windows. In the entrance hall of the editorial office of the French-language liberal magazine *The Carillon* a new shop has appeared. Mathieu Corman is selling a small selection of books, some of which catch Lucien's eye.

In Tienen, Louis Demeester receives through the National Normal School where he studied news that interests him. The collection *My own reading books* by Wilhelmina Blokker is published by Gebroeders Kluitman in Alkmaar. Its are four books illustrated by Sijtje Aafjes for first-grade children who are just starting to read. They are titled *Fit at school*, *One step further*, *A big step forward* and *Already a long way along*. The booklets are written in the style and with the vocabulary found in the readers of the Hoogeveen method, which is now used in many state primary schools and municipal schools, both in the Netherlands and Flanders. Louis immediately purchases the booklets and hopes to see similar ones published for children in their second

and third grades.
Louis Demeester reads further with mixed feelings *De gelukkige klas (The happy class)* by Theo Thijssen. The story of little Louis van Rijn, the pupil whose health gradually deteriorates and who is finally admitted to the hospital with paralysed legs where he probably will die, moves him deeply. He attentively reads this diary-like account of the teacher and his relationship with the children in the class. He is sometimes surprised by the adult's attitude. It makes him reflect on his own practice. Could he himself sometimes be too harsh on the children?
Louis still keeps in touch with Edward Peeters, or Paul Kiroul, as he now calls himself. When he works with older children, he sometimes reads fairy tales by Kiroul, such as *Fikke spring in 't veld*, *Princes Zonnestraal en Tierlafijntje* (*Princess Sunbeam and Tierlafijntje)* and *Wat de elf van het Sprookjeshof vertelde* (*What the Fairytale Court Elves told us)*. As said, the B.I.D.E. moved to Geneva and became the B.I.E. but Louis remembers his mother spoke about Adolphe Ferrière, and so he sometimes reads what is published by the *Ligue Internationale pour l'Éducation Nouvelle (International League for New Education)*. He learns that the French teacher Freinet is encouraging the children in his class in the South of France to correspond with the children in the class of a colleague in Brittany, France. He hears that the same teacher has supposedly founded a *Cooperative for Mutual Educational Aid*, the name of which is the same as the magazine *Printing at school*, something that greatly intrigues Louis.

In 1927, Oostende-Stene Airport becomes busier. Not only does freight traffic provide the almost daily supply of English

newspapers, especially during the summer months, but a regular passenger air link between Brussels, Oostende and London is also established. Naturally, this type of travel is reserved for those with the financial means. Anyone wanting to travel more cheaply to England can do so as a deck passenger on the mail boat to Dover. Rail passengers can also use this connection. After much persuasion, Lucien convinces Charlotte to take a trip to England by turbine ship, now that he had business to attend. They spent a few days in Canterbury and Whitstable. The sight of the white chalk cliffs naturally remind engineer Lucien of the white sandstone produced in the *Briqueterie*. He is conducting tests to use this cellular sandstone based on calcium hydro-silicates as a visible finishing stone as well, and not just for constructing the rough wall. Soon, the *Brickyard Silicon-calcareous* provides several domestic construction companies during the current building boom that is responsible for many new villas in Koksijde, Oostduinkerke, and Oostende. In a sense, he feels the small company he leads is making a modest contribution to what King Albert mentioned in his speech to business leaders and investors in Seraing. The King stated, among other things, that "*to address the crisis in Belgian scientific institutions and laboratories, the initiatives of our industrialists and financiers, the skills of our engineers, the competence of our workers, will remove all obstacles.*"

The prestige of Belgian institutions is also being enhanced internationally thanks to the Solvay conferences. The fifth physics conference now focusing on electrons and protons, takes place in the last week of October and finally brings together again all the

leading figures, including physicists debating the recently launched quantum theory. The leading figures are Albert Einstein and Niels Bohr. Marie Curie, who won a Nobel Prize in two separate disciplines, is also present. Werner Heisenberg, Paul Dirac, and Erwin Schrödinger are in the group photo. The anti-German prejudice that had inhibited Einstein and others from attending previous Solvay conferences has apparently disappeared. Essentially, everyone who had already contributed to the recent development of quantum theory is present, with Heisenberg publicly remarking: '*By providing an opportunity for exchange between representatives from various research fields, this conference has made an extraordinary contribution to clarifying the physical foundations of quantum theory. It represents, as it were, the final completion of quantum theory*'.

A kind of personal note on the sidelines of this conference is the bond between Queen Elisabeth and Albert Einstein. He is being received at the palace as a member of the Solvay Council's scientific committee. Rumours have been confirmed that they played the violin together. This friendship will help Albert Einstein in a few years when he finds himself once more in a precarious situation for political reasons.

Both Lucien and Louis read about the Solvay Conference, each from their own perspective. Louis hopes that the combination of the King's speech earlier that month and the conference's high-level scientific enthusiasm will lead to greater investment in education, knowledge dissemination, and knowledge acquisition. He is therefore rather disappointed with the reactions to the new language system established by Camille

Huysmans at the Athenaeum in Flanders, which now requires only one-third of classes to be taught in French. Instead of seeing this as a favourable development for knowledge dissemination, both Francophone and Flemish-minded people are merely arguing about whether the measure goes too far or not far enough. Isn't this simply political bickering over privileges? Wasn't it Ratke, who in the 1600s advocated for education in the native language and the acquisition of the language of science? Isn't that language of science today mathematics, Louis wonders? Wouldn't it be better for both French and Flemish people to focus on the general improvement of the accessibility and content of secondary education?

Lucien Souris and Charlotte Hofstadter are overjoyed when Charlotte gives birth to a daughter in the spring of 1928. Lucien's father suggests the name *Jacqueline* remembering the boat on which he and Arseen had so many adventures. Meanwhile, teacher Louis Demeester is still single and almost 25. You wouldn't guess his age. He sometimes seems like a big, lanky rascal, picking up pranks from the children in his class. He enjoys joking with friends and acquaintances, and when the class isn't calling, he always has time for a conversation. His visits to his favourite bookstore often run long. He enjoys visiting the young couple who own the shop. Often, conversations about books they've read are interspersed with ironic remarks with other customers about local events or what one or the other read in the newspaper. During a visit to the shop where he wants to buy himself a present for his 25th birthday, he notices that the owner isn't being assisted by his

heavily pregnant wife, but by a young woman who is introduced to him as the shopkeeper's espouse two-year-older sister. She will be staying there until after the baby's birth. This is how Louis meets Graciete Decoster, with whom he quickly strikes up a conversation. Graciete alternates French with a pronounced Ghent accent and Ghent Dutch dialect. Sometimes Louis and Graciete even have to resort to French when the Ghent dialect word is too different from Tienen dialect. They laugh about it. It doesn't take long before Louis invites Graciete to visit his cousins' manor farm, where she meets his brother and sisters. The city-dwelling Graciete is quite surprised by life on such a large farm, which she had imagined differently. She confides to Louis that the upstairs room easily rivals the drawing room in her parents' Ghent townhouse, where she still lives. Ultimately, Graciete stays longer than planned with her sister and brother-in-law. And at the end of the year, no one is really surprised when, after a short engagement, Louis and Graciete marry. The liberal agnostic Louis agrees to a church wedding, as Graciete, whose father is a sacristan in one of Ghent's main parish churches, insists on it. About a year later, Louis also becomes the father of a baby boy. He wants to name him John, and after some back and forth with Graciete's family, because her brother is the godfather, the English name is accepted, when Graciete explained that it would ultimately be the name of *John the Baptist* but that they prefer to hear John rather than Johannes. Louis is not thinking of the Baptist at all, but of the pedagogue John Dewey, whose work he learned from his mother and whose first edition of *School and Society* he devoured. During his

studies he read also *Democracy and Education: an introduction to the philosophy of education*. Friends and colleagues know of his veneration for the pedagogue. When they learn that his son is named John, the young family receives a beautiful silver children's cutlery set engraved with his name. But for the father, there's an extra gift: he receives a copy of the recently published book by Wolters *John Dewey — School en Maatschappij* in the series *Well-known Educators*. This is the translation of the tenth edition of the second English version from 1927. In his introduction, translator T. J. De Boer points out that this edition is characterised by the evolution of the pedagogue's thinking. Louis spends the sleepless nights after John's birth studying this booklet, often with notes in the margins. He underlines '*Learning? Certainly, but first live and then learn through and in relation to this life. When we consider the relationship to school in this way, we find that the child is not primarily a listening being: quite the opposite.'* It is the *active school*, but also the busy Célestin Freinet with his walking classes and the acting children of Fröbel, Montessori, and Decroly. And Wilhelmina Blokker's comment regarding her books, when she says "w*hen children learn to read at school, they are proud when they have progressed so far that they get their first book in their hands and they are eager to show at home how clever they already are*" is almost a self-confirming fact. It's something he himself observes with the beginning readers in his current class, who constantly bring books from the classroom library to demonstrate their reading talents to anyone who will listen.

When he cautiously speaks about Freinet with some of his

colleagues, they tell him about Kees Boeke who started up the *Children's Community Workshop*. Some would rightly point out that in this case, you can't speak about a school. Louis disagrees, unless you assume the word "school" only refers to the institution that instructs listening children. But that's Lancaster-speak, he notes ironically. Isn't the institution that invites children as participants in what's happening, where they partly take charge of the institution, a school, in the sense of a learning school that prepares them for life in society? Louis agrees that Kees Boeke is an idealist, but a revolutionary? Shouldn't every educator assume that the intention is to support children in their quest for knowledge and wisdom? Isn't that precisely what Kees Boeke also aims for, he asks.

Knowledge, science, wisdom. Louis believes he's living in golden times, full of new discoveries. But even in science, there's a kind of dogma that means anyone who makes new observations doesn't necessarily draw conclusions that alter their worldview. Take Cecilia Payne's doctoral thesis from 1915, for example. Payne accurately links the spectral class of stars to their actual temperature. To do this, she applies the ionisation theory of Indian physicist Meghnad Saha. She demonstrates that the large variation in the absorption lines of stars is due to ionisation at different temperatures, not to different elemental abundances. Thus, stars have <u>not</u> approximately the same elemental composition as Earth. Cecilia calculated that helium and especially hydrogen are much more abundant in the stars than on Earth. Hydrogen would even be the most abundant element in the universe. That was in 1915, but a text by

astronomer Henry Norris Russell dissuaded Payne from concluding that the sun's composition is primarily hydrogen. Russell, after all, wrote in 1914 '*The agreement between the solar and terrestrial lists is such that it strongly confirms Rowland's view that if the Earth's crust were raised to the temperature of the Sun's atmosphere, it would produce a very similar absorption spectrum. The spectra of the Sun and other stars were similar, so it seemed that the relative abundance of elements in the universe was comparable to that in the Earth's crust.*' Payne's findings were so contradictory to the scientific consensus that the elemental composition of the Sun and Earth are similar that she described her results as '<u>false</u>'. And now, less than 15 years later the astronomer Otto Struve claims that her work is *"the most brilliant dissertation ever written in astronomy"*. Today, Russell says Payne was right and that he arrived at the same results through different means. The article he published this year briefly acknowledges Payne's earlier work and her discovery. The rather discreet reference to Payne, Louis believes, ensures that Russell, not Payne, is credited for the conclusions she reached in the first place. His mother and grandmother would thus have another example of the misogyny in the scientific community, even today.

More amusing is the correspondence between Shapley and Hubble's in 1925. Shapley fiercely and vehemently opposed Edwin Hubble's observations that there are more galaxies in the universe besides the Milky Way. He even accused Hubble of producing garbage and pseudoscience. Hubble then sent him a letter showing the observed light curve of a Cepheid variable

star in the Andromeda galaxy. Shapley subsequently retracted his criticism and reportedly told colleagues since then: *"Here's the letter that destroyed my universe."* He further encouraged Hubble to write a more comprehensive article. Louis concludes that scientific thinking does indeed offer room for self-criticism and for discarding outdated ideas. This seems more difficult these days in the social sciences. The belief in being right is persistent in matters like economics, religion, psychology, or sociology. Why not adopt a phenomenological approach, like Edmund Husserl's, when it comes to the social sciences?

Lucien is delighted with the boom in sand-limestone production. The factory can barely keep up with demand, and the purchase orders are three years ahead. Yet, he's aware that the building boom will also come to an end. He doesn't believe in unlimited growth. The parcelled areas are finite, and prospecting for the sand reserves in the *Galoper Dunes* extends to the 1950s. Of course, a lot can happen in about twenty-five years… both good and bad. And what worries him in the short term is the leader of that radical party in Germany, which tried to force through a coup d'état a few years ago. He has managed to re-legalise his party, and is increasingly gaining traction with the working class. The way the Dawes Plan's reparations were replaced by the Young Plan is no stranger to this. The newspaper *Le canard enchaîné* warns, and there's reason for it. Lucien knows from his trade contacts that German industry can't handle the taxes required to pay for the reparations, and that it will therefore have to borrow once more from the United States. And although construction is booming in the rest of

Europe, this is only partly due to the reparations. The money merry-go-round remains the same: the United States lends to Germany, which then uses the loan to pay off the wartime allied countries, and those countries use the same money to repay their debts to the United States. And according to the *Canard* America at the moment heavenly invests in the arms industry and in the … German… steel industry.
Lucien is therefore not at all surprised when the crisis erupts in the financial world a few months later. Speculators on the American stock market experience a kind of Dutch tulip bulb or French Law episode: overvalued stocks in an industry that produces more than can be sold suddenly lose much of their value, and panic takes care of the rest. Banks go bankrupt, and thus less money flows to Germany, causing the Young plan to fail. Discontent grows in Germany, and this once again plays into the hands of the radical party calling itself *National Socialist*, whose leader increasingly resembles the Italian dictator. He in turn is mainly supported by dissatisfied veterans, the *Fasci di Combattimento (Combat Bundles)*, whose members also call themselves fascists.
Just as in Italy, the climate in Germany is more nationalistic than socialist, and someone must be the enemy to blame; the Jewish community is identified with the big bankers and is therefore the main domestic enemy, while the foreign enemy is, of course, France, whose leaders are said to have only wanted to humiliate Germany after the war with impossible terms.

Meanwhile, the small family is doing very well. In early 1930, they move to a villa in Koksijde, owned by one of the Brussels

contractors who placed large orders with the brickworks. He explained to Lucien that the plan was for his family to move into the villa when he will retire in about twenty years. Lucien asks him what he intends to do with the house in the meantime, and they quickly reached an agreement that Lucien and his family would move in and maintain it, for a very reasonable rent, with the understanding that they will vacate the villa as soon as the owner is wanting to dispose of it.

Not long after, Lucien and Charlotte go to Oostende to see a talking film for the first time. *The Death of Venus* by Henri Storck or *The Man Who Took Me Home* is on the program for their movie night. Lucien hears from friends in the audience that the bookshop in the Carillon is very successful and that Mathieu Corman has taken the plunge and set up his own shop. He's apparently bought a shop in the same street, near the corner of Place Marie-José. A few days later, Lucien visits Mathieu Corman in his new shop. He finds several books that testify to working conditions in the Liège mining region and the rise of cooperatives among workers. He explains that he's from Flémalle and that his father used to be a mechanic for one of the mining pits in the Liège region. Mathieu Corman then replies that he is from nearby. He could have been Belgian, or even without any nationality. His birthplace lies between Kelmis and Herbesthal and was German until 1919. They then discuss the large companies in the region, including the Kelmis zinc factory and its history, which is associated with prominent figures from early Belgian banking. When Lucien recounts his childhood in Oostende he suddenly remembers the teacher who helped him

to learn Dutch. One day, a young French-speaking teacher came to his class and told them about the mining region. He vaguely remembers them talking about his father. Yes, he remembers her that her name was Jeanne. Lotje is heavily pregnant, and the birth of their second child is imminent. When their second daughter lies in Lotje's arms on April 3rd, Lucien immediately suggests the name Jeanne.

Meanwhile, Mathieu Corman has a new brainchild. Together with Felix Labisse and two other friends, he launches the magazine *Tribord (Starboard)*. It's an avant-garde magazine featuring nearly all the artists of the coastal region. Contributions are included by James Ensor, Constant Permeke, Leon Spilliaert, and Labisse himself, as well as writers and filmmaker and photographer Henri Storck. The magazine will exist for less than two years, but in that short time, it achieved international acclaim. The magazine features themed issues, including '*The woman*', '*Springtime*' or '*Oostende*'. Lucien appreciates the avant-garde character of the magazine, of which he buys almost every issue.

By mid-May, Lotje is strong enough to go to the joint communion party of two of Charlotte's cousins. The menu could be that of a wedding meal: after the *Assorted appetizers* follows the *Crayfish bisques*. After that there is a *Queen's Bite* followed by *Tarbot with butter and new potatoes*. There is a *Saddle of early lamb and fried potatoes*. Then follows *Roasted Brussels Chicken with Apple Compote*, after which there is a *Lobster Salad.* The meal ends with the *Cake, Fruits and Coffee*. Everything is neatly in French, the language with which the wealthy middle class

still distinguishes itself in Dutch-speaking Belgium.
Lucien, who is perfectly bilingual doesn't pronounce a single word of French throughout the entire meal, even when asked questions in French. Charlotte's father appreciates this greatly and while he gets a wink now and then many of the dinner guests react with irritation. So one invite a factory manager who's also a reserve lieutenant speaking flawless French, and here he only discourses in Flemish…

Tienen is located about 80 kilometers from Thuin. Georges Cuisenaire, a twelve years older Walloon colleague of Louis works there and is also inspired by Fröbel, Montessori, and Decroly. He experiments with counting rods, first made of cardboard and later of wood. Many years later, Louis shows his grandson Paulo the rods he himself invented to help his students. But that's for later. Today, he holds his one-year-old son in his arms. The little boy has fallen asleep after being breastfed. Louis takes him from Graciete and places him in the crib. Graciete also falls asleep shortly afterward, and Louis returns to his reading. He reads an article by Paul Geheeb, which evokes Hermann Lietz on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the foundation bearing his name. In it, he writes: *'An inner and incomparably fruitful friendship quickly developed between Lietz and me; together we delved deeper into Fichte's philosophy and developed our educational ideas. We had lived extensively in the city and spent part of our student years in Berlin. The social poverty of the big city had filled us with horror. And imbued with the conviction that the world would be more or less rotten within a hundred years, we became enthusiastic disciples of*

Fichte. We keenly sensed the contradiction between true humanity and the evils of civilization. In fact, we weren't only concerned with the flood of questions related to school reform. Rather, we were interested in humanity in its totality. We did follow the then-increasingly powerful Social Democratic movement and were in contact with Bebel and other socialist leaders. But it was primarily their unquenchable partisan political agitation that prevented us from joining them. For us, the central problem was the entire life of the people. This had to be built on a healthier, entirely new basis through a new education, as Fichte had advocated in his Addresses to the German Nation'.

Louis has serious reservations about this. When Lietz and Geheeb idealised their rural schools, the book containing the speeches to the German nation was a hundred years old. It had a clear nationalist undertone. Bebel was the socialist who, along with Liebknecht, joined the *Workers' International* and subsequently founded the German Workers' Party. He also publicly defended dialogue between different cultures and continued to call himself a revolutionary until the end of his life. He positioned the party he chaired between the Marxist Rosa Luxemburg and the reformist Edward Bernstein. Although Louis still considers himself a non-doctrinaire liberal, he nevertheless believes that Bebel, like many other early socialists, did more for human understanding and to prevent the world from rotting than what he considers nationalist pamphlets, which he considers Fichte's work to be. He questions how this is dealt with within the *International League for New Education*. One can, of course, base oneself on educational models, but according to

Louis, they must always be seen in a broader context. He feels that the debate led by Paul Geheeb differs considerably from what he hears and sees from the emerging *Cooperative Laic Movement* initiated by Célestin Freinet. As a small-town teacher, Louis sees more in Freinet's defense of the school for the people. And this despite his clear sympathies for Soviet Russia, or the Soviet Union as it is now called. Louis read a series of articles in *My impressions as a teacher in Soviet Russia* in *The Emancipated School*. He wonders how a French teacher would react to the Belgian law that encourages municipalities to set up separate classes for "pupils who are lagging behind". If children learn from their own interests, it's hard to speak of "pupils who are lagging behind". Can a teacher ever have "pupils who are lagging behind", Louis thinks, if his lessons constantly take the individual circumstances of the children into account? And that, he believes, is precisely what this teacher aims for, now in Saint-Paul-de-Vence.

Is this desired segregation inherent in conservative thinking? Here, in a country governed by conservative Catholic structures, compulsory education now exists. One way to meet this requirement is through school. There, the drive for homogeneous grade levels threatens to marginalize many children. In Portugal, he reads, where the republican spirit was gradually fading, 80% of the rural population is still illiterate, and in the city, the figures are not much better. Louis believes Adolphe Ferrière can write highly of António Faria de Vasconcelos's brief experiment in Bierges, yet the pedagogue apparently failed to instill his ideals upon his return to Portugal.

The Camoesas Reform remains a dead letter, and there is no mention of a rural school, neither as a boarding school for the children of the urban middle class nor as a school for the working-class children of the region. Perhaps, here too, the conservative pressure from Catholic quarters was too strong. Portugal is presented to him as a country where the social hierarchy is considered eternal and unchangeable by all those belonging to the upper classes. And class segregation remains total, as is evident when reading the local newspapers of the workers' cooperatives and mutual insurance companies. Religion legitimizes material dependency. In the isolated interior, cultural diversity among the population is extremely low. The written word belongs to those with power, primarily the pastor and the more prosperous farmers, sometimes the teacher, if there is a school.

Before he goes to sleep, Louis looks through the latest book by Wilhelmina Blokker. It's another book for first grade, titled *I'm going to read* with the number *1a*, so another book for beginning readers. The author notes: '*Since it has become clear that there is a real need for reading material for children just beginning to read, this volume, "I'm going to read" was added to the 'My Own Reading Books' series. Printed in large, clear letters, this booklet is essentially a precursor to the other reading books in this series.*" When observing the centralising liberal education in France and the hopelessly conservative-controlled education shortage in Portugal, I really shouldn't complain too much," Louis thinks with a touch of self-mockery. Ultimately I can and should offer the children in my class here in this part of rural Brabant

reading books and encourage them to know more than just what happens at home and on the journey from home to school.

John and Jeanne's childhood

John and Jeanne grew up in the 1930s from babies to ten years old children in that part of Belgium that speaks Dutch. John spends his early years in Tienen, Brabant, and then moves with his parents to Ghent, East Flanders. Jeanne spends her entire childhood in Koksijde, West Flanders, and regularly visits her grandparents in Oostende. Due to the 1932 language law, Dutch is now spoken in all preschool and primary schools in this part of Belgium, while at least four hours of secondary school are devoted to French. John and Jeanne would therefore attend primary school in Dutch. However, French is still frequently spoken at home in both families.

Jeanne masters French as quickly as she masters Dutch. After all, it's her father's native language. Her grandparents in Oostende also speak only French among themselves and with the family. Lucien loves French chansonniers. He has a new radio-gramophone, and the 78 rpm record collection is growing rapidly, not only with jazz, but also with songs by Charles Trenet, Jean Sablon, Mireille, Maurice Chevalier, Tino Rossi, Mistinguett, and Josephine Baker. There are many French newspapers at home, and the library contains a considerable number of recent French books, thanks to the fairly frequent visits to the Corman Bookstore. In October 1932, Mathieu Corman takes on an initiative that Lucien greatly appreciates: artists come to present their work during a discussion in the store. The first guest is Blanche Houvenaghel, who talks about her work *Impressions of the Sea.* Lucien's visits to the bookstore

become even more frequent.
Tienen is practically on the language border that runs right through Belgium, and little John mostly hears French spoken when his father takes him to the market. Graciete, who comes from the French-speaking Ghent bourgeoisie, also enjoys speaking French with her son, albeit interspersed with Ghent expressions. A radio is installed fairly quickly and when the *National Institute for Radio Broadcasting* begins regularly to emit on February 1, 1931 he often listened to the concerts broadcast in the early evening with his mother. Under Graciete's influence John listens to classical works performed from a young age. He also regularly hears her play songs by Schubert and Chopin on the wall piano in the front room. John quickly learns to play short pieces on it as well.

Europe in the early 1930s is experiencing rather turbulent times and gradually looses many of its peace ideals. The ruling classes continue to view the world as a chessboard on which all want to position themselves to amass as much property and power as possible. Among the rest of the population some hoped there would never be another war perhaps even pinning their broken rifles on their coats. But disinformation and low education quickly fuels the resurgence of nationalistic sentiments. Other nations or population groups within one's own borders are easily identified as the enemy.

Célestin Freinet can attest to this. During the night of December 2nd to 3rd, 1932, several copies of two posters are pasted on the village walls of Saint-Paul-de-Vence. The first

depicts a dream story written by the children in Freinet's class. Taken out of context, the story reads like an apology for murder. The second poster is more vicious, accusing the teacher of turning his students into Bolsheviks. In response, the municipal authorities led by the *Republican and Democratic Union* and the local association of war veterans file a complaint against Freinet. The government launches an investigation, but meanwhile, tensions between Freinet's supporters and opponents run high. The mayor calls for a school strike. Soon, not only the local but also the national conservative press covers the conflict, which is even discussed in parliament. The prefect brings Freinet before the Departmental Council for Primary Education, where the teacher is censured. Célestin Freinet appeals to the Council of State. At the same time, a petition from the inspector circulates, signed by parents who accuse Freinet of violating his duty of neutrality as a teacher by praising the Russian Revolution. This is followed by a flood of letters against as well as supporting Freinet. Freinet himself writes to the Minister of Public Education Anatole de Monzie and responds to as well personal critiques as those addressed to the *New Education*. The call for a school strike continues, and the minister's response is delayed. On April 23, 1933, a crowd gathers in front of the school and windows are smashed. The children are naturally frightened, and fearing for their safety, Freinet displays a revolver. After this episode he is advised to accept a transfer. He agrees only to take three months' leave, until the summer holidays. But on June 21, the prefect informs Freinet that he is being transferred to Bar-sur-Loup "in the interest of the secular school". Freinet refuses

and requests extended illness leave, which is immediately granted. He decides to devote himself to the *Lay Education Cooperative* while he is exploring how to establish an independent cooperative school. That same year, Walloon teacher Jean Mawet introduces the techniques proposed by Freinet after learning about them during his participation in the *L.I.E.N.*-congress in Nice.

In Moscow, Lev Vygotsky establishes his own research program. Although he never met Piaget personally, he had read his articles since attending the London conference and took notes on them. He largely agreed with Piaget's perspectives on the learning process.

His primary research program, which he launched in 1926, relied on a large group of researchers, including Alexander Luria, Boris Varshava, Alexei Leontiev, and Leonid Zankov. This group investigate the development of what they call higher psychological functions. The culturally driven lower psychological functions are voluntary attention, selective memory, object-oriented behaviour, and decision-making. Lev Vygotsky then guided his team in investigating this phenomenon from three different perspectives:

- An instrumental approach, to understanding the ways in which people use objects as mediating tools in memory and reasoning;
- A developmental approach, aiming to understand how children acquire higher cognitive functions during their development;
- A cultural-historical approach to investigate how social and

cultural interaction patterns give rise to specific mediation and development trajectories.

Vygotsky establishes that children possess an actual level of development when working individually on a problem situation and a potential level of development when guided by adults or more advanced peers. He calls the distance between these two levels the zone of proximal development.

He also believes he can build further on Piaget's formulation of the learning process. In the early 1930s, he reflects on Piaget's conceptualisation of inner development and learning. He adopts a theoretical position on inner speech that differs from Piaget's. Piaget posited that egocentric speech emerges from inner speech and "dissolves" as children grow older. According to Vygotsky, his observations demonstrate that egocentric speech evolves into inner speech and then becomes what we mean by the concept of "thought".

Lev Vygotsky who had already previously been hospitalised dies of tuberculosis in June 1934 at the age of 37. One of his last notes reads: 'This is the last thing I've done in psychology—and I'll die like Moses at the summit, having glimpsed the promised land without setting foot in it. Farewell, dear creations. The rest is silence'.

The silence is even greater than Vygotsky could foreseen. The arrogant and despotic state administration is headed by Stalin. As a sign of the times the leader is increasingly exhibiting dictatorial tendencies, restricts free inquiry related to self-governance, the development of general knowledge, and science that escapes strict central control. Even Nadezhda

Krupskaya admired by Célestin Freinet a few years earlier adopted an ambivalent stance in the 1930s when it came to education, psychology, or art. Vygotsky's work disappears from circulation with him in the Soviet Union and becomes completely unknown elsewhere.

In Portugal, repression against teachers is increasing. Cooperatives and associational life become very difficult after Decree 23048 of September 1933 prohibits civil servants from associating. The existing teachers' unions are disbanded. On the other hand, teachers working in private education are required to register with a national body in order to practice their profession. This body is managed by a board, subject to the approval of the competent Ministry.

The situation in the Weimar Republic is more difficult than in France. The German Workers' Party, with Adolf Hitler at its forefront, now presents itself as the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP) and thus gains broad support. The word "Socialist" is simply opportunism, as the party leadership completely rejects socialism and class struggle. This only results in pitting Germans against each other, it is said. More nationalistic than socialist it is, in other words. The only thing this party has in common with the Communist Party is that both see the Social Democratic government of the Weimar Republic as the cause of the widespread poverty and misery. But the leadership of the party that becomes the elected governing party looks with great displeasure on anything that could be associated with socialism or communism. By early 1933, that

election had become a kind of coup d'état. Louis is stunned to hear how a fire at the parliament building in Berlin is used to silence all opponents of the National Socialists, ultimately meaning the end of the Weimar Republic and is fatal for the *Odenwaldschule* of the Geheeb couple. In the context of the German section of the *League for New Education* the couple had a circle of friends and acquaintances that included Hermann Hesse, Romain Rolland, Martin Buber, Georg Kerschensteiner, Elisabeth Rotten, Adolphe Ferrière, Pierre Bovet, Peter Petersen, Eduard Springer, Alexander Neill and Beatrice Ensor. But within the NSDAP there is the *Sturmabteilung* (*Assault Division)* which consists mainly of poor or not educated young people who are easily persuaded by the rhetoric of the party's leaders. Once they seized power, they increasingly took action against what is called the un-German spirit. This un-German spirit is, of course, the work of intellectuals, including friends of Paul Geheeb. *Odenwaldschule* is also touched. Books from its library are burned, and a Jewish teacher is assaulted and imprisoned. Upon his release, he flees to Switzerland. Paul Geheeb initially thinks that despite the power being in the hands of the National Socialists, everything will work out fine, but he soon realises that is not the case. Together with his wife, who is also of Jewish descent, colleagues, and a group of students, he leaves for Switzerland, where he establishes the *School of Humanity*.

It isn't only the schools that are being attacked by the inflamed supporters of the National Socialist Party. The scientific world is also being severely hit as efforts are underway to purge the Academy of Sciences. Like many others, Lucien realises that the

presence of Albert Einstein and his family in the coastal town of Den Haan, near Oostende is a serious indication that ignorance and nationalistic arrogance are once again gaining the upper hand over the dissemination of knowledge and cosmopolitanism. In April 1933, the Einstein family moves into Villa Savoyarde, along with one of the scientist's assistants. He also still believes that the situation in Germany would improve, but for the safety of the villa's residents, two gendarmes are assigned for permanent guard duty. Even the Belgian royal family insist on this. Nevertheless, the family tries to treat their stay at the coast as a kind of vacation while Albert Einstein awaits the administrative process to become a part-time professor at Princeton, in the United States, an offer he had already accepted the previous year. In Den Haan, the family receive politicians and artists. They also visit Ensor in Oostende.
When the family learns that the German-Jewish philosopher and family friend Theodor Lessing has been murdered in Czechoslovakia by Nazi Party agents, it becomes clear to everyone that Albert's part-time professorship could well be the final emigration for them all. The risk of living relatively close to Germany is too great.

Early November, Lucien hears at Corman's bookstore that the store had also welcomed Albert Einstein. He also learned that the family embarked for the United Kingdom, from where they would travel further to Princeton. During the same period, Corman apparently toured through Morocco by motorcycle. He witnessed actions carried out by the colonising armies. He recounts this in his book *Sous le sable marrocain* (*Under the*

Moroccan sand). Lucien speaks with friends about the recurring tensions resulting from arrogant major investors, industrialists, and their political confidants who continue to colonise, thus triggering ever new armed conflicts. He goes so far as to view the reparations demanded of Germany as a kind of modern colonisation, both by European powers with regard to Germany and by the United States with regard to those European countries. Nowadays, great wealth is no longer tied solely to the ownership of land and raw materials he says, but also, and perhaps especially, to the ownership of shares in debt claims and future sales. He also notes that the small country of Belgium is not relinquishing its resource-rich colony in tropical Africa.

Lucien is somewhat surprised when he is contacted to attend a training camp as a reservist with the intention of obtaining a higher officer rank. This supposedly comes with additional financial benefits. He repeats what he said when he had just become a reserve lieutenant. He has no interest in further military training, not even as a reservist. He only interested in the allowances and pension he is entitled to as a former soldier under Belgian law. Moreover, he has sufficient work with the brickworks.

Still, the conversation he had with the army leadership in Oostende continues to resonate in his mind. On one of his subsequent visits to the *Corman* bookstore he finds Mathieu present and immediately buys his travel adventure. He then casually mentions the proposal for additional military training and expresses his concern about the resurgent nationalism and conservatism. He's not surprised to hear the bookseller shares

his fears. Germany is under dictatorship, as is Italy. Lucien casually remarks he's intrigued by how an Italian socialist teacher with Marxist ideas gradually becomes a dictator. That certainly wouldn't happen with a cobbler's son more in the East, he notes ironically… Corman ignores.
In France, aggressive intolerance is rearing its head everywhere, and similar hotbeds of unrest can be found in Great Britain. In Spain, everything the progressive government of the young republic achieved is threatened by the current government, supported by the conservative church and petty-bourgeois circles. Moreover, support seems to be coming from Italy. This was already noticeable when General José Sanjurjo attempted his coup.

During the summer of 1934, Louis Demeester and Graciete Decoster move to Ghent at her insistence. Graciete is deeply homesick for her Ghent surroundings and convinces Louis to take a position at the Ghent Normal School. Little John is thrilled with the move. His parents are allowed to move into a staff residence, which includes a real tower room. He imagines himself in a castle full of knights, with the garden between the house and the school classrooms becoming his private playground.
Louis naturally takes his library with him, which contains the tiny legacy of his mother that was not lost during the run away from Moresnet to Tienen, but also a large part of the post-war production of Edward Peeters, the Flemish *Educational Association* and the many brochures he obtained through the B.I.E. and the *International League for New Education*. In Ghent

he contacts Chief Inspector Verbrugge and asks to be included in the study circle of the local secretariat of the *Flemish Educational Association*. There he meets Paul van Oye personally during a general meeting, where Van Oye raises the importance of visual learning in science in primary school. Afterward, the two men discuss the IBIS school with Louis drawing parallels between the practical fishing training program and the practical teacher training program.

In his first year of work, Louis often refers to a text written by Karel Ceurremans, director of the teacher training college in Blankenberge, during conversations with teachers, tutors and administrative staff published last year in *De Opvoedkundige Beweging in Vlaanderen na de Oorlog (The Educational Movement in Flanders after the War)*, brochure edited by the Flemish Educational Association. Ceurremans points out the significant changes that the provincial and state Normal Schools underwent, not only pedagogically but also organisationally. Louis, incidentally experienced this himself as a student. He has much more positive memories of his student days than Ceurremans, who humorously recounts anecdotes about the barracks regime to which he was subjected as a student. Louis emphasises that Ceurremans finds support in the official regulations and programs for the application of Dewey's principle '*The school community should be a miniature state*'. Louis also frequently uses the final paragraph of the text in discussions about whether teachers shouldn't be trained at the university instead of at the teacher training college. Ceurremans comments on this: '*I was initially in favour, for reasons I've*

explained elsewhere. Since then, I've become more acquainted with the university and, on the other hand, have gotten to know the Reformed Normal School better. The spirit that still prevails in our universities of applied sciences is certainly not such that we should be compelled to advocate for this reform; quite the opposite. On the other hand, the results already being achieved at the Reformed Normal School are encouraging enough to push things further in this direction.The reasons are mainly related to the educational program and its practical implementation in the Reformed normal school, which advocates a more active student than the memorising student who listens to ex-cathedra professors'.

Louis learns with interest that in Wallonia Jean Mawet founded the *Teaching Cooperative*. He quotes Freinet when saying: "*We want education through work, a culture born from the laborious activity of children themselves, a science born of experience, a thought constantly refined through matter and action*."

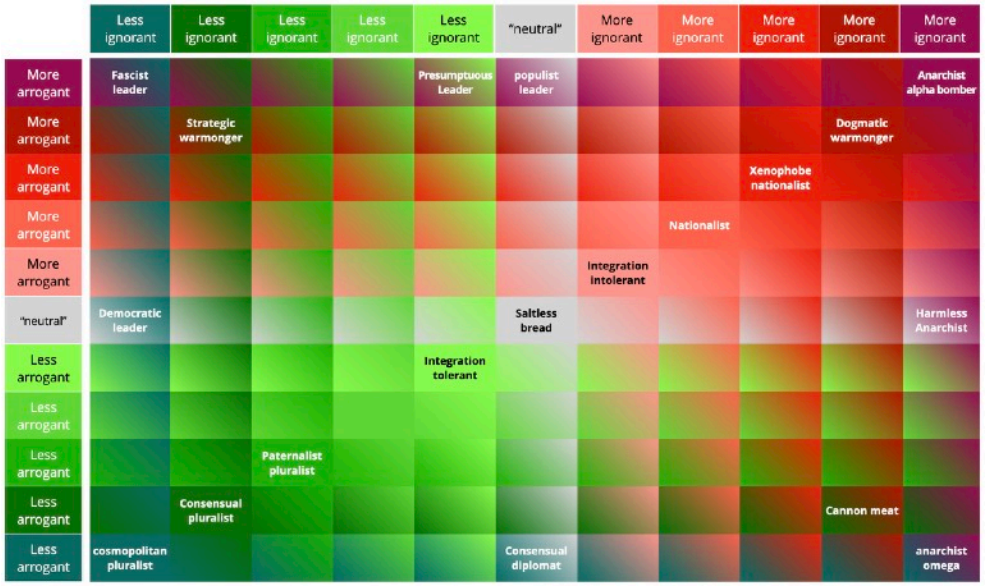
In France, Célestin Freinet succeeds building his own school in Le Pioulier, near Vence, after all the fuss surrounding his person. In October he opens his school still without official authorization, which he initially designed *The Children's Reserve,* a small boarding school for girls and boys. Freinet says that opening this school is the only way to continue his life's work.

Dewey and his daughter Jane go to South Africa in July 1934, at the invitation of the *New Education League* which holds its world conference there. The conference is opened by white officials, not necessarily with a humanistic view of humanity. The Deweys visit schools in Durban, Pretoria, and Victoria Falls and speak with students, administrators, and teachers. In

August 1934, John Dewey accept an honorary doctorate from the University of the Witwatersrand, even though the white governments do not accept Dewey's ideas. Black people and their white supporters are much more receptive to what Dewey advocates.

During the same period, Louis finds his great-grandmother's ignarometric table in one of his mother's notebooks. This table, and the notes attempting to explain the relationship between ignorance and arrogance in human attitudes fascinate him. There are two fundamental aspects to this table, he thinks, that should be better expressed: on the one hand, the relationship between the two variations, and on the other hand, the (for the moment?) unnamed open spaces. The first and most important aspect is the proposed relationship between increasing arrogance and increasing ignorance. He thinks that a grid with an X-axis and a Y-axis would show the sliding relationships more clearly than the table his great-grandmother proposed at the time, analogous to the then emerging tables of chemical elements. The X-axis would represent increasing ignorance, the Y-axis increasing arrogance. This makes it much easier to see at a glance changes in human attitude as arrogance and ignorance vary simultaneously. He immediately notes that half of the types of human postures suggested by his grandmother fall on the diagonal, from two times less to two times more. About a quarter of the suggested types lie on the other diagonal, from less/more to more/less. Visualising the unnamed boxes immediately becomes much clearer. Changes can be predicted not only on the diagonal lines, but also on each horizontal and

vertical line, identifying specific areas within the grid defined by both axes:



Louis considers the types of relationships that make a sustainable, harmonious community possible.

In the lower left corner, one can find the types that make such a community possible; in the upper right corner, the types that make it impossible.

The upper left and lower right corners show the types that hinder the maintenance of a sustainable, harmonious community. He reflects on the correlation he believes to see between forms of upbringing and education and the development of typologies of human relationships, which he transcribed from his great-grandmother's chart. Once again, his thoughts turn to the difference between the natural and human sciences. He isn't looking for a general law of cause and effect, but for a tool with which phenomena can be interpreted and to which attention can be focused, including in a learning

relationship.

In February of that same year, Lucien Souris hears that he will be awarded the Fire Cross. This medal is awarded to all those who received the fire card as proof of at least 18 months of front-line service and will be worn immediately alongside the Iron Medal.

Shortly afterward there is shocking news: King Albert had died after a fall while climbing in Marches-Les-Dames. Rumours immediately began circulating, worthy of a spy story. But Lucien doesn't quite believe any of these theories, especially the theory that the King had been assassinated by the French secret service because he had been planning to abandon the military agreements with France to preserve Belgium as a neutral country.

Lucien doesn't have the opportunity to discuss Belgian politics with Mathieu Corman after King Albert's death, as the bookseller has since departed for Spain once again by motorcycle. At the end of the year, he experiences there the uprisings in the mining region of Asturias against the government including ministers whose party maintains close ties to the Italian dictator and is therefore considered fascist. He writes *Brûleurs d'idoles. Deux vagabonds dans les Asturies en révolte* about the revolt and the bloody intervention of the army under the command of General Franco. Karel Jonckheere translates the travel story into Dutch with the title *Afgoden op den brandstapel. Twee zwervers in opstandig Asturië (Idols on the Pyre. Two Wanderers in Rebellious Asturias)*.Lucien reads the book immediately upon its publication in early 1935. He knows Mathieu often holds radical views and is somewhat surprised by

his limited sympathy for the rebels. Perhaps this made him appear more credible in his adventure stories, which simultaneously served as chronicles of contemporary tensions that arose everywhere. Lucien was even more convinced of this when, over the course of the year he reads *Terres de trouble* (*Lands of Trouble)*. Mathieu Corman uses his travel notes through Central Europe for this book, describing the concentration camps he discovered in Germany.

Not everyone travels by motorcycle, and in Belgium, the rail network is being modernised. The first electric connection between Brussels and Antwerp will be completed in May. Anyone taking the train will be amazed by the speeds of up to 120 km per hour. “When the Ghent-Antwerp line also has electric trains, you won’t have even time to sit down comfortably,” jokes Louis. What’s less funny is that due to the higher transport speeds, more and more fresh products are coming from other countries. And those fresh products bring other problems. It started a while ago, but with the large-scale import of tomatoes and eggplants, the Colorado potato beetle has invaded the country. Their larvae are massively destroying the leaves of all plants of the nightshade family. An import ban is no longer effective. Entire potato harvests are at risk of being lost. Along with bread, they are still a staple food, especially for the least affluent large families. A potato shortage and the resulting rising price could easily lead to famine. In rural areas, entire classes of children are deployed to work with soldiers to catch Colorado beetles in the potato fields.
But Louis has other things on his mind. After a few difficult

attempts, Graciete is pregnant again. This time, it seems the long-awaited second baby is developing well. As a precaution, the doctor advises resting and lying down as much as possible in the last few months before the birth. Louis gets his meals from the normal school canteen, and his youngest sister moves in for a while to help manage the household. Finally, in the spring of 1936, little Hans arrives. Graciete is a bit sad at first, as she had so hoped for a girl. Yet, a strong bond quickly develops between mother and child, which makes John at times jealous. But he's now in first grade and can already read a few books by Wilhelmina Blokker. And that baby can't, he proudly tells his father. Then he says he'll read to his little brother as soon as he's willing to listen.

Louis receives the recently published book from J. R Smid *The Master-Comrade and Libertarian Pedagogy. A Historical and Critical Study.* Smid's study confirms his own restraints about allowing children to develop completely freely. This has likely never been the case in Hamburg schools, anyway. He endorses Smid's assertion that it demonstrates a certain infantilism for an adult to fully accommodate the children's wishes and guidance, with the intention of not imposing a preconceived vision on them. He emphasises the passage in which Smid explains that there is some confusion about the concept of self-education or *self-government.* With Decroly and Montessori one observes that this self-education yields good results. But, Louis agrees, this isn't precisely related to a pedagogy based on the child, in which the adult doesn't somewhat infantilise themselves, or worse, allows themselves to be accepted as an equal in the group. Even

without ever having heard of Vygotsky, he believes that childlike imagination alone isn't enough to shape oneself as a human being. Interaction with the experience of others is essential. Louis recalls the words of Cousinet, quoted by Smid: *"The children do not want the teacher to interfere in their affairs; they consider that a private friendship between a teacher and a child would be a real betrayal on the part of the child and an attempt on the part of the teacher to insinuate himself into their community and share the secrets of their organisation."* So, Louis continues, children want their own private space, but they also want to interact with adults. In contrast, the adult who considers himself a grown-up child actually demonstrates childish arrogance if he still wants to nestle in the child's private space. It seems that learning communities in which adults don't hide their authority perform better, precisely because they distinguish themselves from their younger comrades. Adult educators who, because of their ideological convictions, attack or reject an externally imposed authority must not forget that, precisely because they act as an adult, they thereby immediately establish another authority. Hiding that authority does nothing to build a camaraderie with the children. Children quickly understand something amiss.

Louis feels confirmed in his opinion about the relationship between professional educators and children by a phrase from Paul Geheeb: *'I would rather not use the words 'education' or 'upbringing' anymore, and I would rather talk about human 'development'.'* Geheeb then responds that an educational process is the developmental process in which every human

being is engaged from birth to death. It is an initially unconscious and gradually conscious process of constant confrontation of the person with their environment, with people and things, with nature and culture, the impressions received, whereby each person assimilates some to construct their own individuality, and reject others. He says somewhat jokingly that the distinction between masters and students belongs to the museum of education, as is the rod. His criticism of the schoolmaster could indeed sow confusion, Louis thinks. After all, Geheeb says, *'We must truly live together; adults can't just play, work, walk with children, and share their joys and sorrows, both big and small. We must also allow children, according to their maturity, to participate in their own experiences and actions, so that personal relationships develop more or less internalised. And adults should never act as legislators or superior guides'*. Here he's not talking about small children, but about adolescents helped by adults to find their own path. It is perhaps from these considerations that Paul Geheeb proposes *'to turn schools into living communities, in which people of all ages live together naturally and without limitations'*. Louis believes this isn't the same as what the teacher-comrades propose, who, he believes, have either never heard of Decroly, Montessori, and Geheeb, or, worse, misunderstand the proposals for self-education. And that can be counterproductive, Louis continues. Observation tells us how the playing or working together of children without any regulatory intervention from a responsible adult often degenerate into aggressive behaviour that is difficult to control. Individual freedom shouldn't be an open door for selfish

individualism, Louis adds.

With his circle of socialist freethinkers, Lucien often speaks of the intolerance of conservative forces who, once again, unabashedly adopt nationalist positions and use authoritarianism to silence those who disagree. In Germany and Italy, it's not so much about religious oppression, but about the brutal crackdown on those who criticise National Socialist fascism and the abuse, imprisonment, or killing of those designated by the leaders as "different". This is especially true in Germany for the Jewish and Roma communities, but also for those with a homosexual orientation. This much had become clear when the "protection squad", the *SchutzStaffel* eliminates the "storm division", the *SturmAbteilung*, of the National Socialist Party by murder and imprisonment. They want to centralise the camps where everyone considered a potential threat to the German nation or the NSDAP would be transferred. If Corman is to be believed, this has already the case with the Dachau concentration camp. The Iberian Peninsula is also frequently discussed. There, the military leadership, the conservative clergy, and the Falangists were doing everything in their power to overthrow the Popular Front Government elected in February 1936. A coup d'état turns into a full-blown civil war. Mathieu Corman integrates a group of international journalists, including Antoine de Saint-Exupéry and Ernest Hemingway, and reports regarding the *Red Fleet* whisper that they would bring weapons to the Republicans of the Popular Front. But there is no proof of this. Some ships of the *Red Fleet* do help during the evacuation of children from conflict zones. On April 26, 1937,

Mathieu Corman witnesses the bombing of the Basque town of Guernica by a formation of German bombers. Both in Belgium and other Western European countries, there are doubts that the German military leadership would have gone so far as to actively participate in the internal civil war in Spain. A short time later Mathieu enters angrily the Ostend police station bringing in an unexploded incendiary bomb with a swastika, which he claimed he had brought all the way from Guernica. He is sent away and takes the bomb to his office, where he showed it to anyone who claims to doubt the identity of the perpetrators of the Guernica bombing.

In neighbouring Portugal conservatives are ruling with increasingly dictatorial tendencies after a military coup marked the end of the First Republic. For the time being, there is less lethal violence, but the conflicts between the rival parties are leading to drastic changes, including in primary education. The Republicans' dream of a primary school is stagnating, and preschool is completely absent. For the new rulers, primary school must be nothing more than a place of instruction and socialisation for political passivity, obedience, acceptance of the order and hierarchisation of society, and the promotion of rural values and traditions. Women are on a second place. The leaders of Portuguese society advocate a trinity and promote the slogan *Faith, Fatherland, Family*.

According to many of Lucien's anarchist friends, the repression used by the Soviet Union's rulers is not much different from what happens in Italy, Spain, and Germany. Opponents are imprisoned and sent to labour camps where survival is often

difficult or impossible.
In general, it's clear these days that international relations are becoming politically increasingly difficult, while in some countries, internal relations are also becoming increasingly violent. Here and there, people are saying in the news that a new war is on the horizon.

Sisters Jacqueline, Jeanne, and Nora Souris, aged eight, six, and four respectively, are unaware of this. In Koksijde, they have a garden at home, and outside, the dunes and beach serve as their playground. They make full use of it, and Charlotte is always nearby.
Perhaps that's because, all things considered, life in Belgium continues as usual. Aggression usually remains a matter of words. The most conservative pastors don't go beyond invoking hellfire for the father of the family who doesn't raise his children strictly Catholic, meaning send them to Catholic schools. Intolerant individuals or groups don't walk around with knives or revolvers to injure or kill those who think differently from them. Some parties and groups are more concerned with internal aggression than with potential attacks from others. Meanwhile, socialists and progressive liberals continue to build structures that are not subject to the church. Foundations, funds, and public libraries aim to educate the people, and Lucien observes how the Flemish-minded try to steer a course that isn't too radical. That's generally true, but not always, he adds. The conservative liberal Maurice Lippens was minister of public education for a while and showed little interest in further democratization of the country or in better public education.

Moreover, his sympathies for National Socialism are well known. He is known to be a member of the *German-Belgian Society* and is invited at the party meetings of the German National Socialists. On the other hand the Minister of Education François Bovesse until last year, only advocated for further Flemish integration within Flanders. Lucien clearly remembers his guidelines in the *Civil Mobilisation Booklet*, which stipulates the duties of Belgian civil servants in the event of war and occupation. The fact that such a mobilisation book is considered necessary is, of course, a sign of the times, Lucien fears.
Queen Mother Elisabeth sets different priorities. She is very fond of art, and quite a few people know she is a violinist herself. In 1912 she gave her teacher Eugène Ysaÿe the title of *Master of the Court Chapel.* And now, 25 years later, she is establishing the *International Competition Eugène Ysaÿe* for the first time. It's a competition for young performers of erudite music, which she hopes to make an annual event.
The scientific community also remains open to more peaceful initiatives. The current Minister of Public Education Julius Hoste is establishing the *Royal Flemish Academy of Sciences, Letters and Fine Arts of Belgium.* And thanks to Solvay, Brussels remains in the international spotlight. There hasn't been a physics meeting since 1933, but this year the international chemistry conference will continue under the chairmanship of Ghent University professor Frédéric Swarts. *Vitamins and hormones* are the subject of debate.

On September 27, 1938, Lucien is called up to report to Oostende at the 1st company of the 3rd brigade of the *Guards of*

Communication Routes and Establishments, in French abbreviated as *G.V.C.E.* or *Gardes des Voies de Communications et Établissements*. This call-up comes as a result of tensions at various German borders. He commands a platoon of reservists. The mobilisation is short-lived, a kind of more vigorous exercise, and by October 3rd he is already back at his post at the brickworks. The called-up reserve soldiers assume it's simply a false alarm and return home relatively calm. At the end of October, Lucien even receives a thank-note from a reservist who is a musician in civilian life:

Dear sir,
I hereby send you my sincere greetings and thank you very much for your kindness towards me during our brief encounter as soldiers in Oostende. Fortunately for all of us and for the beloved ones we left behind, everything turned out well. Let us hope it stays that way, and that we as citizens can be of assistance to each other. Should the time come when I can be of service to you, please register where I live.
In the meantime, I send you my very warm regards, JF.

To this Lucien replies:

Koksijde 28 10 1938
Dear Sir
I'm pleased to conclude from your letter that I've managed to leave you with a decent memory of the few days we spent together in Oostende, playing soldiers.
Fortunately, as you say, it didn't get worse, and let's hope we never see each other again… in khaki.
On the contrary, in civilian clothes it will always be a

pleasure for me to meet you again.
Thank you very much for your kind offer of assistance. Should the opportunity arise that Artist F can be of service to me, I will not hesitate to contact you.
With kind regards.

Yet Lucien isn't entirely reassured and can't help but think how, 25 years ago, madness suddenly struck without any warning. Afterward, successive waves had contributed to thousands of young men being sent to the front. They were subjected to attacks without any experience whatsoever, using old battlefield tactics that didn't adequately account for the impact of modern firearms. As a result, an unbelievable number of young men on both sides lost their lives occupying devastated stretches of no-man's land, which could then be retaken by the other side the next day, with an equally absurd death toll.
There's the disturbing news of German intervention in the Spanish civil war. Today, it's no longer just a Mathieu Corman observation. Without considering either camp as a bearer of absolute evil or absolute good, it's clear that German intervention is on the side of those who attacked a government with a coup d'état. This doesn't bode well for Belgium, which is still struggling with its difficult-to-defend neutral status. And that the German military leadership does indeed support General Franco's military apparatus is undeniable. Corman, the Ostend socialist leader Peurquaet, the "Red Fleet" captain Arseen Blondé, and many others mobilise for solidarity with Spanish republicans. Around May 1, 1938, a Red Fair is held at the Ostend velodrome to benefit the Spanish socialists. Shortly

thereafter, many crew members and former crew members of the NV *Ostend Shipping Company* temporarily shelter Spanish children evacuated from conflict zones. This is how Begonia Pereda, from Bilbao in the Basque County, ends up with the Souris family. She quickly learns to speak a few words of French and spends most of her time with Jeanne's grandparents in Oostende.

On April 1, 1939, two days before Jeanne Souris' ninth birthday, the civil war in Spain ended. In recent months, Lucien nows more about the Spanish events not only thanks to the local socialists and anarchists, but also thanks to the *Canard Enchaîné*. The civil war, which initially seemed to be a defensive war between a legally elected republican left-wing alliance against an alliance of the conservative military structure and a very conservative Catholic Church, would have degenerated into a struggle between Orthodox communists supported by the Russian Stalin and the Falangists backed by the German and Italian dictators. Many republican socialists, anarchists, and non-Orthodox communists came under fire between the two warring factions. Lucien is not the only one questioning the Soviet intervention, which ultimately did more harm than good to the republicans. The sudden withdrawal of the international brigades after first weakening the local republican alliance could only have resulted in the victory of General Franco's army.
Begonia Pereda returns home. Before her departure, she tells Jeanne and Jacqueline Souris that she was so shocked during the first week of her stay when they kindly told her: '*Viens, nous allons manger des gateaux*'. *Viens* and *manger* she already

understood, but would the Belgians eat cats (*gato* in Spanish)? She was panicking that day until she saw it was about pastry.

The summer passes relatively peacefully, despite palpable political tensions internationally, as German dictator Hitler first orders the occupation of Austria and Czechoslovakia and also threatens to invade Poland. So Lucien is not surprised when, at a quarter to ten in the evening of August 25th, he receives a telegram sent an hour earlier from Oostende, stating: "*Mobilisation phase A has been declared. Contact your meeting point immediately.*' He is briefed in Oostende by the command of the third brigade *G.V.C.E.*and six days later sent on leave, with the advice to be ready. Despite the German government's assurance that the principle of neutrality would remain in force for Belgium, the military authorities had not forgotten the events of 1914. Moreover, as part of its modernisation, the Belgian army had numerous orders in progress with German companies, and there are ongoing difficulties with these. Some orders were simply cancelled by the supplier, which did not bode well. In September, the United Kingdom and France formally declare war to Germany after German troops invaded Poland.

Yet life goes on as usual.

On October 21st, the entire Souris family sits for a banquet at Hotel Damberd to celebrate the wedding of friends of Lucien and Charlotte. The menu includes: *oxtail soup* followed by *cooked turbot with potatoes in cream sauce*. Then there is *veal sweetbreads with mushrooms*, a *leg of lamb in vegetable wreath* and *roasted chicken with salad.* The desserts consist of *ice cream,*

fine fruits, sweets and mocha. Among the wines *Sauternes, Chateau Puisseguin 1929, Coupe de France 1928, Beaujolais 1929* and *Veuve Testulat are* on the list.
In December, the Souris family receives a photo of the port of Bilbao from Begonia and her parents as a Christmas card, with the message everything is quiet in Spain.

On January 13, 1940, Reserve Lieutenant Souris is once more in army service, this time for an indefinite period. He is given command of the 2nd Platoon of the 3rd Company of the 3rd Battalion G.V.C.E. in Veurne. As with all battalions of the G.V.C.E. his platoon's equipment consisted mainly of outdated weapons and war spoils from the previous war. Reservists come and go. Due to their personal circumstances, many are entitled to return home until a general mobilisation is declared. The few Walloon reservists who ended up in his company are demobilised a month later. On March 4, Lucien receives a letter of thanks:

My Commander,
I came back safely and resumed my usual activities; during the first few days I was a little disoriented (you don't immediately shake off the dolce far niente *of military life).*
I hope that when I am fully back in the swing of things, I will not have to put on the uniform again.
I suppose you are still in Veurne and hope that the liquidation of our partial demobilisation is not causing you too much trouble.
I am sending you an enlargement of the photo of our platoon, the original of which I showed you. Each man received a similar one. I am waiting for the development of other photos, which I will also send to you.

I do not want to end without telling you again the good memories I have t from the few weeks I spent under your orders in the 3rd of the III.
I hope that events will allow me the leisure to come and visit you one day soon in civilian clothes.
Please accept, Commander, the assurance of my best regards.

Lucien doesn't have time to answer this time, but he thinks about the *sweet idleness*. He really hopes that that the *dolce far niente* will not turn into a new bloodshed in the western corner of the country.

He feels like it's war without being war. And that's not a comforting thought. He remembers all too well how quickly the German military almost completely overran Belgium in 1914, and now their military leaders apparently have the same fighting power again. He finds the expression *Drôle de Guerre (Phoney War)* used by the French weekly *Gringoire* not *drôle* at all. But as time goes by, he becomes increasingly certain that his English business friends with whom he's still in touch are wrong to speak of a non-real war. Not real in England for the time being but very real elsewhere in Europe and beyond…

What might be *drôle*, if it didn't smell as political intervention, is the letter Lucien receives as commander on March 20, the literal translation of which follows:

Dear Comrade,
I am writing this letter to you at the request of one of your former subordinates, Private HM of the Second Platoon, who was first stationed in Veurne and now in Oudenburg. He claims he is in very bad shape there and that there are

men from the area whom he doesn't know.
There he says very badly about the food, while at your place it was very good.
Perhaps you can have him come to you again if it suits your good will and if you are allowed to do so, please.
In the meantime, best party wishes.

On this letter, Lucien felt it necessary to respond as quickly as possible in clean Dutch. So, on March 23, he writes (translated):

Dear party comrade,
I received your letter of December 20th regarding MH.
I assume the interested party has also informed you of the reason for his relocation. You will have to admit that the disciplinary measure taken is not even commensurate with the seriousness of the offence.
Moreover, in my opinion, it is in al H.'s interest he remains far away from Veurne.
I therefore regret that I cannot provide immediate satisfaction in this instance and hope to be more successful in any subsequent case.

It has now been more than two months since the army units were notified with the message *'Enemy attack almost certain'* While Lucien Souris continues to wonder if and when war will finally break out in Belgium, Louis Demeester reads the guidelines of March 29th concerning the establishment of the Secondary Education Improvement Council. This council will advise on curricula and everything related to secondary education. The council will provide guidelines to inspectors and review the inspection reports, as well as advise on various exemptions. Furthermore, the council is responsible for

schoolbooks, price lists, teaching materials, and library books. For John, who is now ten and a half years old, that list may include all of Karl May's *Winnetou* books, as well as those about *Dik Trom* and *Pietje Bell*. He has already read everything available in the school library several times. Louis has seen a book compiled by Age Scheffers on the list, called *The Book for Youth* but that is not available at the moment.
Louis then sets the guidelines aside and focuses on more practical matters. It's only March, but he has to think about the coal supply for the boarding school and the daily Normal School to prepare for next winter. And it would also be useful to stock up on food. You never know.

The army leadership is informed about what is being communicated to the soldiers and reservists on the occasion of King's day. Thus, on April 9, 1940, Reserve Commander Lieutenant Souris of the 3rd Platoon of the 2nd Company reports to the commander of the 3rd Battalion in Oostende.

Subject: King's Day.
A weapons review was held on April 8, 1940 at 11 a.m. in front of the cantonment.
The following personal took part: 1 officer, 2 non-commissioned officers, 3 corporals, 24 soldiers.
In my speech, I briefly outlined the following points: the significance of the review; the memory of King-Soldier Albert I; the wise government of HM Leopold III aimed at maintaining peace in our country; His concern for the material and moral well-being of our soldiers (including five days of leave granted at his express command, etc.). While the weapons were being presented, the national flag was

raised from the flagpole of the cantonment building and 'to the flag' was sounded by the platoon bugle.
Sunday service was held in the afternoon.
A special menu was provided for the three meals of the day.

The report doesn't include any details about what those three meals contained. However as in other occasions Charlotte keeps the menu from the celebratory meal on May 5th regarding the first communion of one of her nieces. The menu is entirely in French, but handwritten. Until the last minute, there was doubt about whether the meal would go ahead, so printing costs were saved. Moreover, only a small portion of the family is present. Some prefer not to travel to Dendermonde in these uncertain times, and others simply cannot or are not allowed to travel. But the meal is no less festive for that: *Watercress cream*; *Truffle delights*; *Chateaubriand, asparagus, croquette potatoes*; *Pineapple with Kirsch*; *Creamy mushroom crust*; *Brussels chicken Lettuce heart salad*; *Glazed lamb*; *Cakes*; *Fruits - Desserts.*

This is the last festive meal Charlotte attends for the time being. On May 10th, around five o'clock in the morning, German troops cross the border, and aerial bombardments are also reported.

Pays Réel (Real Country) the newspaper of a Belgian fascist organisation reports the next day on the invasion of German troops in Belgium. The royalist newspaper condemns the invasion, citing the King's declaration of neutrality, which the German government had accepted. Lucien carefully reads the exchange of notes between Foreign Minister Spaak and the German ambassador, Mr. Von Bulow-Swante, which, according

to the newspaper, occurred at 8:30 a.m. the previous day.
The Belgian minister is said to have stated:

Mr. Ambassador,
The German army has just attacked our country. This is the second time in twenty-five years that Germany has committed a criminal aggression against neutral and loyal Belgium.
The one that has just been accomplished is perhaps even more odious than that of 1914.
No ultimatum, no note, no protest was ever presented to the Belgian government.
It was through the attack itself that it learned that Germany was violating the commitments it had made on October 13, 1937, and spontaneously renewed at the start of the war.
Germany's aggression, devoid of any justification, will violently offend the universal conscience. The Reich will bear responsibility for it before history.
Belgium is determined to defend itself.
Its cause, which within that of the Law, cannot be defeated.

According to the newspaper, the German Ambassador then handed the following note to the minister:

The Reich government has instructed me to declare the following to you:
In order to forestall the planned invasion of Belgium, Holland and Luxembourg by England and France, clearly directed against Germany, the Reich government was obliged to ensure the neutrality of the three aforementioned countries by force of arms.
For this purpose, the Reich government will field an armed force of the greatest magnitude, so that any resistance will

be useless.
The government of the Reich guarantees the European and colonial territory of Belgium, as well as its dynasty, provided that no resistance is put up.
Otherwise, Belgium will risk the destruction of its country and the loss of its independence.
It is therefore in Belgium's own interest to appeal to its population and its army to put an end to all resistance and to give the necessary instructions to the authorities so that they can contact the German military command.

Still according to the newspaper, the German ambassador received a negative response from Minister Spaak. And for the next eighteen days, Lucien, as commander of the 3rd Company of the 3rd Battalion is responsible for maintaining and protecting roads, bridges and communications in the Veurne region.
On Sunday May 12th he receives the list of passwords and *approach words* for the week of May 11th to 20th.
On the fourteenth, he reports to the commander of the IIIrd Battalion that he had located an unguarded cable point in De Panne, with no French soldiers nearby, and had therefore posted a guard. He had not known the post was unmanned, and he had not been able to protect it on his own initiative until then, unlike what he had done in Veurne and Koksijde.
On May 17, Lieutenant Lucien receives the following message: *Provincial order. Order of His Majesty the King. From 8:00 a.m. on the 17th of this month until 8:00 a.m. on Sunday, the 19th of this month, civilian traffic on foot, by bicycle, or by car will be prohibited in the streets. The GVCE soldiers will assist in enforcing this order. Offenders will be imprisoned, and their carriage, bicycle,*

or any other means of transportation will be confiscated.
The GVCE officers will remain among their troops. The order will be announced tonight in the municipalities through circular letters.'
Lucien assumes the roads must be kept clear for retreating troops and that the withdrawal has to be swift and safe. He warns Charlotte that, as planned, she must be ready to flee to France with the children and a family of friends as foreseen. And indeed, on May 18th, the 45th Battalion receives orders to rejoin Rouen and form a bicycle and infantry detachment. This order is relayed by the commander of the 46th Battalion. That day, Charlotte's mother dies, according to neighbours terrified by the resurgence of the gunfire of 1914. Charlotte only learns of her mother's death much later. Her sisters and brothers-in-law are able to leave the Dendermonde area that afternoon, after making funeral arrangements.
Lucien understands due to the immense chaos that the German army is rapidly approaching. He notifies Lotje and the friendly couple to leave for Rouen as soon as possible. Meanwhile, the G.V.C.E. is assigned new missions. Lucien Souris receives confirmation of a telephone message at 9:20 a.m. from the Commander of West Flanders, stating that a platoon is to move to Oostduinkerke and be placed at the disposal of Lieutenant D, to guard political prisoners. Furthermore, there are secret orders to establish centers to house isolated soldiers for their reintegration. That evening, he receives a personal message that reads: '*Lotje and the children left at 8:15 a.m. across the border of Ghyvelde.*'

On May 20, the companies from Ghent and Beverlo arrive at Veurne, also en route to Rouen. It is now clear to Lucien that the entire army is withdrawing. On May 21, he receives the following message:

> *Place rating.*
> *Colonel Schmidt took up the duties of Commander of the Furnes Square on the morning of May 21st. Squadron Leader Prinée took up the duties of Major of the Garrison. The offices are located at 14 rue de Dunkerque at the Commandant of Étaples. The recipient civil and military authorities are requested to provide their assistance to the Commander of the Arms and his representative, the Major of the Garrison, and to maintain contact with him.*

Meanwhile, one of Charlotte's sisters has arrived in Koksijde with her husband Roger. There they hear that Lotje has already left for France on the 19th. When Roger says he wants to follow his sister-in-law, Lucien informs him that Lotje and the children were on the night of May 19th in *Le Wast* nearby Boulogne-sur-Mer and are trying to reach Rouen. Roger will try to find them and drive towards France the next day. Two days later, Lucien receives a message that Lotje and the children and their friends are be in *Mers-les-Bains*. They arrived in good health, having managed to cross the Somme at Saint Valéry. Meanwhile, Charlotte's other sister and her husband, Eduard, have arrived on the coast. News arrives from France that the refugees from Koksijde have spent the night in Pavilly. Lucien wonders if they have turned off to Rouen or if they are heading further south.

On May 26, the company commanders of the III Battalion *G.V.C.E.* has the order to leave the area. The following day,

Commandant Souris receives instructions not to allow gatherings on bridges and intersections, not to allow refugees to circulate outside the receiving areas, and to prohibit all circulation outside the city limits, except for civilian authorities, doctors, and nurses who can provide written permission. Commandant Souris translates the instructions given in French and then has the regulations distributed among the sentries. That same day a message arrives from the provincial General Staff that the Gendarmerie is setting up a barrier along the Oostende-Torhout-Boesinghe railway line. Furthermore, caution is urged with telephone conversations. Regarding paratroopers, the following is written: "*As soon as they descend, fire unless you are certain they are ours. Otherwise, disarm them and send them under escort to the nearest police station*." This message is transferred to Commandant Souris for execution.

On May 28, at 10:15 a.m., Lucien Souris receives a secret message from his superior that the guarding of the bridges and roads of Veurne remains under his command. Six hours later, he receives the following message from one of his men: '*Two sentries from Roozebrug came to report that a gendarme had come to them, saying that they should lay down their weapons and ammunition and leave the bridge. Four men from the Engineers and a sergeant were going to stay there. The guard corporal therefore asked what should be done. The men from the Nieuwpoort bridge had not seen anyone, this according to the sentries' statement*.' Commander Souris then requests the answer to be transferred immediately: "*We have no orders to receive from isolated gendarmes. Instructions will come in due course from*

General M".

Three quarters of an hour later, Commander Souris Lucien sends the following message:

> *GVCE III Battalion, 3e Compagnie.*
> *To the leaders of the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th platoons.*
> *From this moment on, our troops will no longer participate in any operations. You will immediately withdraw all guards from the bridges. The men will then be gathered at the cantonments to await instructions. You will have the men collect their ammunition and deposit it at the cantonment where the Company's kitchen is located (Vandecasteele Farm).*
> *Lieutenant LS, Company Commander.*

He sends a message to the Sergeant-in-Charge to collect the ammunition, put it in a pit and cover it with a tarpaulin to protect it from any rain.

May 29th is a confusing day. Although all hostilities must cease, it is unclear what should happen to the army units or to the large numbers of refugees who seem to be gathering on the French coast. Lieutenant Souris receives a written message from Lieutenant General M. that messages intended for the army might arrive at the G.V.C.E. by wireless telegraphy. Since the Lieutenant General himself does not have electricity, he orders: *I ask you to do what you deem appropriate to communicate to me, as and when you receive them communications relating to the Belgian army which have an official character.*'.

The country is once again occupied by German troops. As early as June 5th, the occupiers issue instructions regarding the release of Belgian gendarmes and customs officers and

regulations for Belgian soldiers working in agriculture or industry.

On June 7, Lucien Souris receives a message at his home address. The local commander in Oostende requests him to report that day around 11:00 a.m. to receive instructions regarding the 3rd company of the 3rd battalion GVCE. Lucien Souris replies he has to report to the German local commander in Koksijde at 10:00 a.m. that same day, also for instructions, making it difficult for him to reach Oostende by 11:00 a.m. He says he might have a vehicle at his disposal, but in this case, he would need a safe-conduct to present to the German authorities and asks if he can obtain such a document. He eventually manages to reach Oostende where he receives a message that it is not yet certain whether reservists would also be imprisoned.

In his diary he writes: *Lotje, Roger, and children in Neuvy. Cars hidden to avoid requisitioning.* They've apparently crossed the Seine and then continued their journey via Alençon, Le Mans, and Tours. He waits. The next day, a circular letter translated from German, arrives with the following content:

> *Military command in Belgium and France.*
> *The Fürher decided on 5-6-40 that all prisoners from the provinces of West Flanders, East Flanders, Antwerp, Brabant (excluding the city of Brussels and the district of Nivelles) are immediately released. Prisoners from other provinces (i.e., the Walloon regions) are to be transported to Germany. However, prisoners from these regions, exercising various professions or who can be identified as Flemish, can be released immediately.*

On June 12, Lucien Souris received his exemption certificate.

That same day, a Ford 78 registered in Lucien Souris' name is fitted with a French license plate in Moulins, and registered on the *Renaissance Avenue* in Neuvy. The license plate number is given to the driver the next day, and the refugees continue their journey. And apparently just in time, because on June 18th, Lucien writes in his notebook: '*Alençon taken! Rennes and Cherbourg occupied*'.

Meanwhile, Lucien has lost track of Lotje and her friends, but on June 30th, he receives a message from a colleague who has returned to Koksijde by bike that his family left Moulins on June 14th with the intention of traveling further to the south of France. On July 11th, Lucien receives a letter from Georges Felix, director of the *Public health* in Cahors saying that his family has been taken to a shelter farm near Cahors. Lucien immediately contacts the Belgian Red Cross, and the prefecture of Cahors is also contacted. On July 17, Lucien receives the following accompanying letter from the Belgian Red Cross:

> *Mr. LS, Factory Manager, Avenue de la Dune in Coxsyde, is responsible for collecting Belgian refugees, including young children and especially infants, from the French departments of Allier, Puy de Dôme, Haute Garonne and other departments in the South of France. The French authorities are urged to provide Mr. LS with help and assistance.*
> *Furnes, July 17, 1940*

Lucien makes the trip to Cahors with his friend Gerard, who has a 1939 Chevrolet Station wagon that seats eight people and disposes of a trailer. When they arrive in Cahors two days later, *chauffeur d'auto communale* Gerard D's safe-conduct is provided

to undertake a one-way trip between July 16th and 25th, departing from Cahors, accompanied by seven people, officials and family members returning to their posts in Belgium. After a night's rest at the host farm, the Souris family departs with their friends and Gerard, while Lucien's car is returned by Roger, also carrying a couple with two children. On July 24th, the small procession arrives safely in Koksijde.
Shortly afterward, Lucien learns that a large part of the board of the *Ostend Shipping Company* have been diverted to Fleetwood, while several fishing boats and their crews have been diverted to southern English ports where they have been given light armament partly to be deployed against U-boats in the Channel.

* * *

Around noon on Saturday, May 11, 1940, Louis and Graciete receive a visit from Graciete's brother. Louis usually prefers him see him leave. That's the case today too when he sees his brother-in-law waving with the Saturday copy of *The Real Country*. Louis always had thought his brother-in-law has Rex sympathies, so now he's certain of it. But then he sees the newspaper headlines: "*Germany attacks Belgium, Holland, and Luxembourg. The three attacked countries defend themselves and appeal for help from the Allies.*" Below that large title, in the middle, is a photo of King Leopold III with the title on the left *Rex at the service of Belgium* and right *German planes over the country*. *Many civilians killed.* and below that "*Long live Belgium, long live the King, long live Leon Degrelle*". Then follows a message condemning the invasion. Given that the neutral stance

has failed to produce the desired results for the second time in a quarter century, the newspaper writes, there is no other option but to take up arms and defend the country and the king. Unity is strength; all yesterday's disputes are now irrelevant, the article concludes.

Louis recalls his childhood experiences, when his father and grandfather were shot and his mother, along with his siblings, was forced to flee. He also knows that schools and other large government buildings will have to house soldiers. So he immediately advises the director of the Normal School to send as many as possible boarding school students home while they still can. He wants to try to avoid the potential violence of war with his family. Graciete has already packed some clothes in a suitcase for four-year-old Hans and herself, and Louis asks John to quickly choose two items while he also prepares a suitcase for him and his son. John decides to take a teddy bear and a book, explaining that the teddy bear is to comfort Hans when he can't fall asleep and the book is to read to him. They leave for Lille, intending to travel to the French coast and attempt to cross the North Sea to England from there. On May 15, they find shelter in a boarding house in Lille, which is overcrowded with Belgian refugees from Ghent, Deinze, and the Kortrijk region. News arrives that Dunquerque is full of soldiers and, moreover, already has many refugees from West Flanders. But in almost all coastal towns between Calais and Le Crotoy fishing boats are taking refugees on board to ferry them to England. Louis and Graciete travel towards the coast and, after several failed attempts to board, they finally arrive on 22nd of May 22 at

22 at *Berck-sur-Mer.* Although there are fewer people here than in previous places, they still do not manage to cross to England. When they learn a few days later that all available boats are primarily intended to transport back British soldiers, they abandon their attempts. The king's capitulation has the unexpected consequence that the sympathy they had often felt as refugees from the French people they came in contact with quickly fades. As German troops also occupy France and the supply of food becomes more difficult, the mood sometimes even becomes hateful.
Along with several other Ghent residents whom Louis and Graciete have met in the meantime, they decide to return home. Just as it had for Lucien and Gerard in Cahors, the prefecture grants Louis safe passage to return to his hometown with his family to take up his post. By the end of August, the family is back in Ghent. The state Normal School had been partially occupied to house German soldiers, and the official residence is in use as officers' quarters. After mediation, the Demeester family is able to use part of its own home.

International contacts in the scientific and educational worlds are once again almost nonexistent in Belgium, now that the country is occupied by a foreign army ruled by a dictator with a well-developed repressive apparatus.
During the years 1941 and 1942, Louis had virtually no knowledge of what is happening with the pedagogues of the *International League for New Education* or with the teachers who work with Célestin Freinet.
He doesn't know that Freinet is captured and that his school has

been closed. The buildings have been rented out to a Christian shelter for Czech children.
He has no news from the institutions that encourage children's self-governance. He has also heard nothing about *Dom Sierot* and *Nas Dom*, the two orphan houses started by *Janusz Korczak* as a children's republic or about its broadcasts for children on national radio since the German invasion of Poland.
Louis ignores Paul Geheeb's new pleas for the school of humanity, with which he promotes his school on Lake Leman to the wealthy European bourgeoisie. The school gradually accepts only German and German-Jewish children of parents who run away from Germany. On the one hand the financial situation of many potential applicants has become downright dire, and, moreover, international financial transactions have become difficult.

Lucien resumed his work at the brickworks now that the family is reunited in Koksijde. During his trip to France to pick up the family, he also tried to gather information about those who served under him or about young soldiers he came into contact with in May 1940, often at the request of concerned relatives of those involved. As a result, he keeps many letters and postcards in his personal correspondence, such as the following:

Dear Commander and Madam,
On the occasion of New Year's Eve, it is my great pleasure to send you, my wife and myself, my best wishes. May 1941 bring the fulfilment of your deepest desires!
I also offer you once again my sincere thanks for everything

you were willing to do for us, both in the painful wartime circumstances and upon the return of wife and children from France. I myself have the fondest memories of my commander, who was adored by the entire company. With the utmost respect and deepest gratitude.

Many Belgian families were forced to adapt in order to live under the occupation and yet not collaborate with the occupying power.

Mathieu Corman removed all Russian publications from his bookstore. But in July 1941, the shop was raided. He decided to go into hiding, after which he fled to England where he intended to join the resistance. The shop reopened a few months later and was run by Mathieu's espouse and their friend, the writer Henri Vandeputte.

Belgian railway workers are having increasingly difficult times. The German government is not providing train drivers for international connections, so Belgian drivers are forced to drive German transport trains. Some drivers know they are deporting prisoners to closed camps. Many feel torn between their fear of being deported themselves, their desire not to endanger the supply of the Belgian population, and their desire not to collaborate with the occupying forces. Partly for this reason, many railway workers join the emerging resistance.

Jeanne knows little about all this. She's happy to have "freed" herself at the age of twelve from the Catholic village school, the only primary school close to home she'd been able to attend since the war broke out. She's allowed to transfer to secondary school and to take the tram back and forth to Oostende during

school days to attend classes at the “neutral” Rijksatheneum. She quickly makes her new circle of friends there. She increasingly stays overnight in Oostende with her new best friend whose father is an accountant at the SEO. Neither girl thinks much of it when some of their new friends disappear after a short time, until they hear that the German occupiers have issued a decree prohibiting official schools from admitting Jewish children. When she talks to her father about it, he tells her that certain conversations are best kept in the living room, and that this is one of them. He warns her not to make any rash remarks at school or on the street. He then tells Jeanne to be prepared that others in her circle of friends could be arrested and imprisoned simply for being Jewish, spreading communist ideas, or perhaps being involved in acts against the occupying forces and the occupying forces learned about. He adds: “Leave protest and resistance to the adults who know how to act.” She is quite angry. When a German soldier rides past a few days later at nightfall, she and her eldest sister open their bedroom window and loudly shout insults. They immediately close the window again, but behind the curtain, they see the man get off his bicycle and look in all directions. When a few days later two men in uniform ring the doorbell both sisters tremble with fear. But apparently, the visit has nothing to do with them; it’s just some routine check ordered by the local commander.

Despite the occupation and imposted restrictions, the Belgian administration actively investigates any financial irregularities during May 1940. On August 14, 1942, Lucien receives the following letter:

Mr. LS,

I would like to ask you for a little information. I had to repay approximately 1,300 francs overpaid in 1940 in Coxyde. I had declared that I had received 5,000 francs from you. However, Mr. N claims that we only received 4,000 francs. Perhaps you could use the documents to tell me who is right? Thank you in advance.

I would have already come to say hello to you if the road was opened, but I only have an authorisation for Bruges through the main road. Believe me, I still remember the days of May 1940 and your good hospitality… At that time, especially after May 28, when everything became useless, I was quite a "cellar man" but since then, after the so-called 'bombardments of the port of Oostende being an invasion port', I feel as safe on the 1st floor as in the cellar.

I would still like to escape the bombs to witness the end of this strange war.

Please accept, Mr. LS, my devoted feelings and present my respectful regards to Madam.

Lucien answers:

Coxyde, August 19,

Dear Mr. B,

Here is the requested information.

Seeking a fair distribution of the funds received, I advanced you 5,000 francs, given that you had been in service throughout the month of May. Comrades VN and N, who started on May 10, received 4,500 francs.

Our accounts were examined, for the first time by a department of the Ministry of Finance; I also had to repay around 1300 francs (would this be a uniform rate?)

A second inspection is currently underway at the offices of the G.V.C.E. Administrative Office in Bruges. We can therefore expect to have to make a new restitution. Let us hope that this will be the last and that the fee will be lower than that of the Ministry.
I am pleased to learn that you are no longer a "cellar man", as in May 1940… however I see from your letter that you are still in contact with comrade N; has he also changed?
I hope, like you, to witness the end of this strange war and to be able to offer you a good whisky on the occasion of this happy event.
Please accept, dear Mr. B, my best regards.

Lucien then receives a reply that their mutual comrade takes the train to Bruges or Ghent every evening to spend the night there, as he does not trust the air-raid shelters in Oostende, and that in his case, only a train accident will prevent him from experiencing the end of the war.

In Ghent, John is a student at the Royal Athenaeum. He still devours all kinds of adventure stories when he receives a new book as a gift from his father. He has now a reprint of *The Book for Youth*. It's a book of nearly 800 pages and John immerses himself in a world of stories that were previously virtually unknown to him. Years later, he would still quote parts of Max Havelaar, with the story of Saida and Adinda deeply moving him.
In early 1943, Graciete takes in a Portuguese priest. Officially, the Portuguese is in Ghent to study Flemish Primitives and religious art. He has contacted Graciete's father for this purpose,

and he obtained the necessary permissions. Since his daughter's house is spacious despite the fact some rooms have been allocated to the occupying forces, he is welcome. Father Alfredo speaks excellent French, and Graciete is delighted to be able to discuss church history and the mystery of Fátima with him. The priest is happy to oblige. In practice, and practically under the noses of the occupying forces, he is part of a network that provides assistance to English pilots and resistance fighters suspected of attempting to travel to "neutral" Portugal helped by the French resistance movement, from where they can easily reach England. The conversations about religious matters are therefore good cover.

For the rest, Father Alfredo is more interested in the *International League for New Education* and for the work of Ferrer, Korczak, and Decroly than for the mystery of Fátima. He is eager to learn more about the Belgian period of António Faria de Vasconcelos who died shortly before the German dictator expanded the war to Western Europe. Together with Louis, he reviews Jeanne Teacher's notes on this subject. He confirms what Louis already knew about the influence Faria de Vasconcelos and António Sérgio had on the efforts to modernise education in Portugal shortly after the establishment of the republic. Father Alfredo speaks with Louis Demeester about Adolfo Lima and Alvaro Viana de Lemos. He tells him that Adolfo Lima had been briefly associated with *A Voz do Operário* Jeanne took notes about. In 1929, the institution had 612 children in its own schools and another 3,000 in contracted schools. Adolfo Lima found the administration and pedagogical

support poorly organised. Father Alfredo recounts Adolfo Lima's disappointment, who resigned in the 1930-1931 school year, saying he was tired of the old, difficult-to-adapt routines. He wrote '*our good comrade who has become boss is a hundred times more authoritarian and rude than the big bourgeois*' in a letter to his friend Viana de Lemos which is otherwise related to the compilation of a pedagogical encyclopedia.

This is the occasion to discuss ideology, but also church and state. One evening, Louis and Graciete bring the conversation back to the mystery of Fátima, and now they hear a rather critical priest, Alfredo. "Without wanting to offend Graciete," he explains carefully, "I would say that the visions of the three little shepherds in 1916 and 1917 might be quite different from what has been published recently. The little shepherds would have been in *Cova da Iria*. First, they saw appear the Angel of Peace, also known as the Angel of Portugal and the following year the Virgin Mary herself. But two of the three children died shortly afterward. Only Lúcia dos Santos is still alive. After the 1926 coup and the subsequent installation of an authoritarian conservative government, the church hierarchy suddenly showed great interest in Lúcia's sightings. At the age of 14 she was admitted to an intern college. According to the Bishop of Leiria, this was the best way to protect her from the many pilgrims who came to *Cova da Iria* and wanted to speak with her. But this way, of course, makes it difficult to hear her speak for herself. The first written version of her memoirs only appeared in 1937. Graciete and Louis may have heard by then that new versions were soon to follow. Only in the last version

though she speaks about the secret announced to her. The first part is a description of hell, where the souls of sinners will end up. You could say that her description corresponds quite well with the thunderous sermons of conservative priests in her childhood. She could not read or write at the time and probably memorised what she heard in catechism lessons. Lúcia renders the second part of the announced secret as follows: *'You have seen hell, where the souls of poor sinners go. To save them, God wants to establish the consecration to my Immaculate Heart in the world. If you do what I say, many souls will be saved and you will have peace. The war will end, but if they do not stop offending God, a worse war will begin during the reign of Pius XI. When you see a night illuminated by an unknown light, know that this is the great sign God is giving that He will punish the world for its crimes, through war, famine, and persecution of the Church and the Holy Father. To stop this, I will come to ask for the consecration of Russia to my Immaculate Heart and reparatory Communion on each First Saturday. If my requests are fulfilled, Russia will be converted and will have peace. If not, it will spread its errors throughout the world, promote wars and persecution of the Church, the good will be martyred, the Holy Father will suffer greatly, various nations will be destroyed, but in the end, my Immaculate Heart will triumph. The Holy Father will consecrate Russia to me, which will be converted, and the world will be granted a time of peace.*The publication of these memoirs dates back only two years, at the request of the Portuguese Church authorities. I cannot help but wonder. Not the German National Socialists, but the Russian Communists are the source of the

current evil. The unknown nocturnal light may have been an exceptionally far-south Northern Lights in January 1938. There is no way to know whether this light was announced to Lúcia before 1938, just as there is no way to know whether the name Pius XI was announced to her before 1922. It seems very likely that the Portuguese Catholic Church primarily wants to warn for what it sees as the ever-recurring danger of a secular state curtailing the Church's power. Sister Lúcia, as she is known today, apparently refuses to say anything about the third part of the secret because the Blessed Virgin Mary allegedly forbade her to do so. I cannot help but feel that this account is vague. It's reminiscent of the documents based on much older oral traditions in the history of faith in general and the Christian faith in particular. In 1917, there were far more qualified recipients for a clear message from God than three illiterate little children in rural Portugal.

Louis and Graciete listened attentively, and now Graciete says, "You may be right, of course. But mysticism is mysticism. Perhaps the Blessed Virgin and the Almighty would rather appear to unspoiled young children than to interpretive theologians or intellectuals."

Louis responds: "Or perhaps the church still needs these kinds of stories because there are still many among its leaders who find no other way to support and guide those who believe and have faith."

On earth, Father Alfredo appears to have good contacts. He tells, for example, that Célestin Freinet was released from prison at the end of 1941 but is under house arrest outside his district. He

and his family are staying with Élise's mother. Louis tells us that Jean Mawet, thanks to his contact with Adolphe Ferrière publishes *Conseil aux Parent (Advice to Parents)* in the Belgian magazine *Le Service Social* that is regularly is sent to the Normal School.
About *Janusz Korczak* the news isn't good at all. There are quite credible reports that at the beginning of the occupation of Poland he and all the children from his orphanages were taken to the Warsaw ghetto, where the German occupiers relocated all Poles with Jewish antecedents. Since August 1942, no trace has been found of him, as well as that of the approximately two hundred children and some of his closest associates. It is feared that he was transferred to a concentration camp.

John is now 14 years old. He spends his time between the Royal Athenaeum and afternoon conversations in the courtyard of the Normal School. Occasionally, young German soldiers come to get some fresh air in the courtyard, and these chance encounters mean that John now knows some German and can hold a simple conversation. Some of the boys are only five or six years older than John, and one of the topics of conversation are Karl May's books.
A recently arrived German conscript appears to have had to interrupt his teacher studies when he was called up. He tells John that he has been a student of *Paul Geheeb*. He also confides that morale in the German army is low and that even among the officers, many are fed up with the dictator. When John tells his father about this Louis says that little remains of the initial euphoric conversations about how Germany would become

great again thanks to its leaders. Occasionally, it's clear that everyone just wants to go home. Regular officers talk more about their wives and children than about the future great German nation, in which they perhaps no longer believe.

The next evening seems surreal. Louis never knew how or why. Apparently, the resident officer wasn't at all a defender of National Socialism. Could he have overheard a few words from the conversation between John and Paul Geheeb's former student? The officer tells Louis that he's not a professional soldier and that in civilian life he teaches languages at a university. He explains that during his training, he was gradually persuaded to participate in activities organised by the *National Socialist Teachers' Union*, founded and managed by Hans Schemm. At that time the *Nationalsozialistische Lehrerzeitung (National Socialist Teachers' Newspaper)* was talking about a National Socialist view of the world. This required appropriate, ongoing development, in which experiences had to be discussed. Louis' conversation partner explained that he participated in two mountain excursions to a *Reich* exchange camp. In this way, wrote the *Teachers' newspaper,* the Teachers' Union would profile itself as '*the joint effort of all people who consider themselves or want to be considered teachers or educators, regardless of origin, education and type of educational institution.* During the last two years of his studies, the NSDAP designated this teachers' union as the only teachers' organisation in the *Reich*. This was in the midst of Greater German euphoria, and most people were unaware that behind the provoked hostility toward certain population groups, including German Jews, lay an intention to

initiate systematic persecution, resulting in many forced labourers and deaths. In the eyes of many teachers, National Socialist ideals seemed a good basis for better living conditions, and according to the teachers' union itself, nine out of ten German teachers became members. During his first year as a teacher, the German officer recounts, this teachers' union, then led by the teacher and NSDAP party official Fritz Wächtler, was absorbed into the *Nationalsozialistischer Deutscher Dozentenbund (National Socialist German Lecturers' Association)*. As far as he knows, that union is still active.
A few days later, Louis discusses this with Father Alfredo. He is told him the union only had fewer supporters in Austria. Alfredo explains that a group of teachers, including Father Heinrich Maier, even founded a resistance group and campaigned against the social system imposed by the NSDAP. The protest stemmed from the fact that religious matters were also affected by National Socialism, as religious schools were closed and religious events at school were generally banned. In schools, political and physical training was promoted, encompassing both sports and paramilitary training.

Early September 1944, everything suddenly changed. The German soldiers leave Ghent, and now the Normaal School is partially occupied by successive groups of Canadian soldiers. The German army also leaves Koksijde. The newspaper *Vooruit* published by the Socialist Party has its first 'after occupation' free issue as it announced on September 7th. The editors did stop publication at the beginning of the occupation, but that did not prevent a group of collaborators with the German occupation

from publishing the title *Vooruit* to use it for their propaganda. Nevertheless, in this issue the Socialist Party calls for refraining from senseless attacks on traitors and collaborators.

John switches from German to English. He quickly understands that the American backwoods no longer have anything to do with Karl May writings. One of the Canadian soldiers tells him that Karl May, by the way, has never been to the areas where he situates the stories of Old Shatterhand and Winnetou. Then he hears from the same Canadian soldier that dictator Adolf Hitler also enjoys reading Karl May. This brief conversation will later lead John to reflect on the role of heroic stories in the development of children and young people. John also collects names and addresses. He wants to correspond with the entire world one day.

Louis has to justify the supplies the Normaal School provided, including coal, to German occupiers. He could easily demonstrate that to keep the Normaal School running, he needed the coal for the kitchens and for its own heating. When those supplies became threatened he used a ruse to obtain coal from Germany free of charges. He had the boilers shut down, leaving the part of the school requisitioned by the German authorities without power.

On January 26, 1945, Lucien Souris is also asked to provide information about all his actions in May 1940 and his activities between May 28, 1940, and October 1, 1944.

He declares that after May 28 he did not take part in military activities against the occupier but that he did act in a civil

capacity and writes: "*Having accepted the order of surrender, I considered that, by this fact, I had undertaken to cease all military activity against the enemy until a regular authority decides otherwise and gives me the order to take up arms again. If, however, the question posed also concerns my attitude in civilian life, I can answer affirmatively. Never since 1940 have I doubted the final victory of the Allies. I have always loudly proclaimed this conviction and fought German propaganda. I have thus urged greater caution from those around me who, convinced of the German victory, were only too willing to collaborate, especially economically.*

I have never hidden my contempt for the enemy's collaborators, especially those who usurp public office (the ersatz mayor and aldermen of my region). In the economic sphere, I did not hesitate to sabotage the factory I was managing, in order to prevent it from producing at full capacity for the enemy."

He also states that he has a clean criminal record as a soldier. However, a statement from 1923 is cited in his criminal record concerning his having a soldier under his command stay overnight with family in Oostende so he could pick up fresh fish early in the morning at the fish market and take it to Dendermonde. He replies that he didn't know what happened to his personal file and doesn't have the criminal record himself. He does mention that he seems to recall his superior saying in 1923 that, given his service record, he would only receive a verbal reprimand, and that he was unaware that this was being recorded on his criminal record.

That seems to settle everything.

The news appears in the Paris edition of the May-edition of the American Defence Journal *Stars and Stripes* that Hamburg Radio has officially announced Hitler's death. Lucien hopes this marks the effective end of the war and that the Allies have learned something from the previous one. Hopefully, this time, they won't demand exorbitant reparations. Could post-war reconstruction be approached in a more constructive way? He thinks pre-war investments might play a role after all.

On July 18, Lucien is summoned before a military commission of inquiry. A complaint is said to be pending against him because of the activities of the *Nouvelles Briqueteries Silico-calcaires de Coxyde (New Sand-lime Brickworks of Coxyde)* between May 1940 and October 1944. He asks what facts he is accused of, and apparently it concerns an additional check of an investigation that was dismissed as unnecessary by the military prosecutor of Veurne.
The complaint concerns the results of the Briqueteries. Lucien writes about this on August 13:

> *Referring to my statement, during your inquiry of the 5th of this month, I have the honour to send you herewith the balance sheets of SA Nouvelles Briqueteries Silico-Calcaires de Coxyde relating to the years 1940 to 1945. As the annexes to the Moniteur for the years 1944 and 1945 have not yet reached me, I am sending you, for these two years, balance sheets on plain paper.*
> *As I have told you, the profits of 1942 came from real estate transactions, mainly from the sale of 6 hectares of land.*
> *From 1943 onwards, the civilian sector received virtually no building materials, as the occupier reserved everything for*

its own needs. I then, on my own initiative, decided to shut down the brickworks; the danger of aerial bombardment was cited as the reason for this decision being ratified by our Board of Directors.

I also wanted to send you the results for 1945. The unfavourable results of this year, as well as those of 1944, are the result of my management of the war years. Indeed, during the occupation I neglected to carry out normal repairs and maintenance of the machines, in order to put our installations in a state unable to work at full capacity for the occupier in the event of requisition or change of management.

A month and a half later, Lucien is informed that there were no grounds for sanctions or prosecution, as he had ensured that the factory produced only a tenth of its capacity throughout the occupation, as a result of his actions. His primary concern during the war had been to have just enough resources to pay the workers without producing.

Shortly thereafter, Lucien is a candidate on the list *Community interests* (*Gemeentebelangen*) for the municipal elections of September 1945. The program includes several post-war improvements in the areas of urban planning and tourism. It also includes establishing a daycare center, a municipal insurance fund, and further development of municipal education. A warning is issued against voting for a competing list headed by a person barred from participating in the elections due to a conviction that stripped him of his civil rights. The targeted candidate then sowed doubt in the local press by making a distinction between being allowed to vote and being a

candidate. Ultimately, the military prosecutor clarifies the outgoing mayor that the man in question is not allowed to participate, neither as a candidate nor as a voter, meaning that the information on the list *Community interests* is correct. The smear campaign against *Community interests* continues perhaps with the intention of smearing anyone with socialist or communist sympathies in the eyes of the public. Ultimately, it apparently succeeds: the man in question does run and is elected. The municipal elections are then declared null and void. Conservatives and former collaborators agitate to overturn the nullification. But new elections and lists are being drawn up. *Community interests* secures its representation on the municipal council. Lucien is in a non-electable position and does not intend to actively participate in municipal politics any longer. He is now 54 and wants to focus his energy on restarting the brickworks under the name *NV Batiforvit Cellular Sandstone*.
On December 31, he was finally released from all military obligations with the rank of captain-commander.

Post-war developments

At the end of the war, 15-year-old Jeanne is recommended the language department for her upper secondary schooling at the Atheneum. She would rather go to the mathematics department, dreaming of an engineering degree, but is strongly discouraged, as this type of profession is less suitable for women, she is told.
In May 1945 she learns that her former mathematics teacher Honoré Houvenaghel, who had suddenly disappeared from school during the war, had apparently been active in the resistance against the Germans and was therefore arrested. He was imprisoned in a concentration camp where he died. From the obituary, she learned that he was, among other things, vice-chairman of the *League of Education*, something she will later tell John and his father, when they talk about Edward Peeters and the *Society Tot 't Nut* which in the early years of the *League* served as a source of inspiration.
During the same period, Louis learned that *Janusz Korczak* was deported to the Treblinka extermination camp along with the 200 children he was responsible for. Upon arrival, all the children and their companions were murdered.

Gradually, Lucien is able to pick up the thread of scientific progress again. He shows Jeanne a statement by Edwin Hubble. Hubble says that Leavitt's discovery of how to accurately measure distances on an intergalactic scale paved the way for modern astronomy and for understanding the structure and scale of the universe. According to him, his observation that the

universe is expanding is a consequence of Leavitt's groundbreaking research. Therefore, says Hubble, Leavitt would have deserved the Nobel Prize.

Jeanne and her father also read about Cécilia Payne-Gaposchkin. Her work is discussed in scientific journals now that she is at Harvard. As a woman, she cannot become a professor and is only allowed low-paying research. The fact that she is being talked about is related to the publication of *The Stars of High Luminosity* in 1939 and *Variable Stars* in 1938. Thanks to the efforts of her mentor Harlow Shapley, she was that year awarded the title *Astronomer.* Payne then requested that her title be changed to *Phillips Astronomer,* a position that would make her *officer of the University*. There is opposition. To get approval for her title, Shapley compromises and explains that this does not equate Payne-Gaposchkin with a professor. He later insists on an explicit professorship as *Phillips Professor of Astronomy* which she ultimately achieved. However, her courses were not included in the Harvard University catalog until 1945.

Jeanne sighs. The world of science remains a very closed world for women. And this is still due to the lack of proper secondary education for both boys and girls. Would the government, now less Catholic and more liberal and socialist, do something about this locally? But apparently, the main concern is restoring the balance between Catholic and official education. In 1947, Minister Camille Huysmans was accused in the House of Representatives of establishing unnecessary schools. The attack is directed against the network of official schools, which is claimed to be unfair competition for free, say Catholic, schools

which often charged tuition fees. It was the subsequent Catholic government that solved the competition problem by providing significantly more subsidies to 'free' education, making it more accessible even without high tuition fees.
In 1948, reforms are envisioned to ensure a better flow from primary to secondary school and from secondary to higher education. This, it is said, also entails more suitable education for girls. Jeanne is now starting her final year of secondary school and wonders what this means. More progression into science or more new side tracks for girls. But apparently, languages are in her future if she passes the university entrance exam. Meanwhile, she enjoys the math lessons of the young teacher Monstrey who also has a somewhat sarcastic sense of humor. As an example, he recently said when they were discussing wars and scientific discoveries: "*the first war of this century was for chemistry, the second was for physics, the third will be for biology*'.

On May 9, 1948, the Hofstadter family attend their cousin Nicole's solemn communion in Dendermonde. It is simply an opportunity to reunite, as Charlotte, like Lucien long before as well as the children, has also severed her ties with the church. After the war, the menu is simpler than before. However, a few familiar dishes remained. *Countess Soup*, *silver sloops*, *sole with Normandy sauce*, *Brussels chicken with mixed fruit, salad and mayonnaise*, *almond ice cream*, *fruit*, *dessert*, and *coffee*, all in Dutch this time.

In 1949, it seems as if the war is long over. New conflicts are

already looming, Lucien thinks when he learns of the founding of NATO. This is made at the request of Allied military commands, now excluding the Soviet Union, precisely because the other allies fear aggression from beyond those borders.

At the end of last year, he learned that, due to his long service as a reserve officer effective in November 1940 and April 1941, respectively he would be awarded the Officer's Cross of the Order of the Crown and the Order of Leopold. But the sailors who actually fought against German U-boats with their armed sloops and boats both in 1914-1918 and in 1940-1944, and therefore applied for veteran status are receiving no compensation. All sorts of fallacies are being advanced, including that they didn't take an oath, that military laws were never read to them, or that they merely practiced their profession, albeit under difficult circumstances. The son of a former naval engineer believes that a little recognition would be appropriate.

Mathieu Corman resurfaces in Oostende with new provocations. He manages to display books that anger both the left and the right. During the war, he unsuccessfully attempted to train as a paratrooper with the British army to be dropped in Belgium. But according to him, Belgian Intelligence consistently opposed his active participation because he was a member of the Communist Party. Ultimately, he spent the war in London working as a secretary.

Lucien listens to the story with a smile. What makes him smile less is that the *NV Ostend Shipping Company* is becoming less and less socialist. Some administrators even publicly say that the fleet has never had any ties to any party. But the attitude of the leaders

of the Socialist Party itself also angers him. He believes that political opportunism is increasingly being played, and the party is becoming less and less at the service of those who truly advocate cooperative work and mutual aid. This embarrasses his daughter Jeanne one day while she is walking with her father along the seawall. When the leader of the local Socialist Party addresses him as *'Hi Lucien, how are you?'* he looks at his daughter and asks *'Do you know who that gentleman is who is speaking to me?'* She doesn't know how to respond to this and with a small nod she walks on.

Belgium has been a kingdom without a king for almost ten years now. Although Leopold's brother Karel has been appointed regent since the end of the war, it remains questionable whether the King will be restored to his constitutional rights, now that almost five years after the first attempts, no agreement has been reached between the King and the political parties on the conditions for his return. Lucien believes that those in power are sowing unrest and division from all quarters, and that the end of history might be that the regent remains. He is mistaken, precisely because the divisions sown almost lead to armed conflict.

After his conversations with Jeanne about the misogynistic world of science, Lucien reads more about Harlow Shapley whenever he sees his name pop up in newspapers or magazines. And that's not difficult. In the United States, there's a rapidly growing distrust of anyone who criticises President Truman's stance. This is especially true with the *Independent Citizens Committee of the Arts, Sciences and Professions* which includes many former Roosevelt supporters. It is a diverse group of individuals from the arts and sciences who,

among other things, strive for lasting peace and raise questions about the atomic bomb. Comments are also made about Truman's implicit acceptance of racial discrimination and anti-union policies. In November 1946, Harlow Shapley is summoned by the *House Committee on Un-American Activity* in the capacity of board member of the *Citizens Committee* in Massachusetts. He accuses the *House Committee* of Gestapo methods and says that its political radicalism threatens to turn citizens into cowards. In recent months, Harlow Shapley has been mentioned again, this time as chairman of a *World Peace Conference*, which is dismissed as a Russian-driven affair.

Lucien is certain that wrong things happen in Stalin's Russia and that there, too, there is little tolerance for dissenters. He remembers episodes where non-orthodox communists are sidelined or imprisoned. He also knows how, in some communist parties, members unwanted by the leadership are harassed or expelled.

But for the moment, Lucien doesn't often have the opportunity to talk to his friends about this kind of arrogance of those in power. On July 22, 1949, he receives a national patent for his invention, described as "*manufacturing process of lightweight stone with a porous and cellular structure*". He devotes all his time to construction fairs at home and abroad, with the aim of extending his patent to the entire customs union between the Belgian-Luxembourg Union and the Netherlands, as well as to Southern European and North African countries, where the insulating properties of the stone offer significant advantages.

That intolerant arrogance is not only a characteristic of some

church leaders or governments, but also of the leaders of party structures on both the right and the left, is something that Célestin Freinet can attest to, Louis thinks, when he hears about the latest developments in France. The French section of the *International League for New Education*, or *French New Education Group* is completely dominated by communist militants. As early as 1943, tensions arose between the Communist Party and Freinet. In 1946 Freinet finally left the group accusing them of not paying enough attention to what teachers with classroom experience had to say. His school has since been accredited and has been provided with three state teachers. He informs the members of the (*Cooperative d'Enseignement Laïc*) *Laic Education Cooperative* to consider a broad discussion platform that also offers logistical support with printing presses, correspondence between classes, and the production of materials to support the children's projects. In 1948, he decides to baptise that *Cooperative* as *Institut de l'École Moderne* (*Institute of the Modern School and* shortly after that *Institut Cooperatif de l'École Moderne*. Louis reads attentively the booklet written by Élise Freinet *Birth of a people's pedagogy* that just came out.
Near Paris, Fernand Oury is intently studying the work of Célestin Freinet, after several unsuccessful attempts to survive as a teaching assistant and then as a young teacher in the capital's suburban schools. He writes an enthusiastic letter to Célestin Freinet and starts his own cooperative class.

In October 1949, Jeanne Souris moves to Ghent. She enrolled in the first year of her Romance Languages program. There, she builds a small, close circle of friends with whom she spent a lot

of time. Soon, she has more than one place to stay over.

Meanwhile, John has started his first year of medical school for the second time. He doesn't think he'll succeed this time, but staying at the university allows him to pursue his new hobby. He's a member of the university flying club and is close to earning his license to visually fly single-engine aircraft. The flying club and bike rides with friends take up more of his time than classes in the medical school amphitheater.

End of book 07

A strange letter

Dear Pascal

We are taking advantage of small glitches in the space-time continuum to allow you to become a saga of educators, pedagogues, and anthropogogues. The saga was first published in 122.15 (Holocene calendar), which corresponds to the year 2215 according to the calendar you use in the 21st century.

The dynasty spans 20 generations, from 1630 to 2222 in your era.
When we studied your century in preparation for the work, we found your name and your interest in dialogical learning. That is why we kindly ask you to further disseminate the documents we send whenever we get the chance.

You can rest assured. The glitch in the continuum will have no impact on the past or future of living people. Only documents can be sent through it.

On behalf of the team of writers,

Maria Liber

Leaden Times was compiled by four contributors to the saga.
Binh Pham looks at communication and disinformation from a historical perspective. Babitha, a historian, studies the relationship between oppressor and oppressed. Sayen's interests lie in dialogical learning and the guiding of the learning process of young children. Zanaibu investigates how the presence of xenophobic and fascist mindsets in hierarchical societies acts as a unifying force for local communities.

This seventh book of the saga continues the adventures of Jeanne Teacher, her son Louis Demeester, and her grandson John, set against the backdrop of the *Éducation Nouvelle* and the *Escuela Moderna*.
We find ourselves in the first half of the hectoyear 119, a period dominated by two major wars. These are therefore **Leaden Times.** We follow the impact of these wars on the lives of people in former Belgium and Western Europe through the adventures of Lucien Souris, Jeanne Souris' father.
Jeanne grows up in Koksijde, John in Ghent, two cities in the Kingdom of Belgium.
Both spend their teenage years under foreign army occupation and gradually become aware of what is happening around them..